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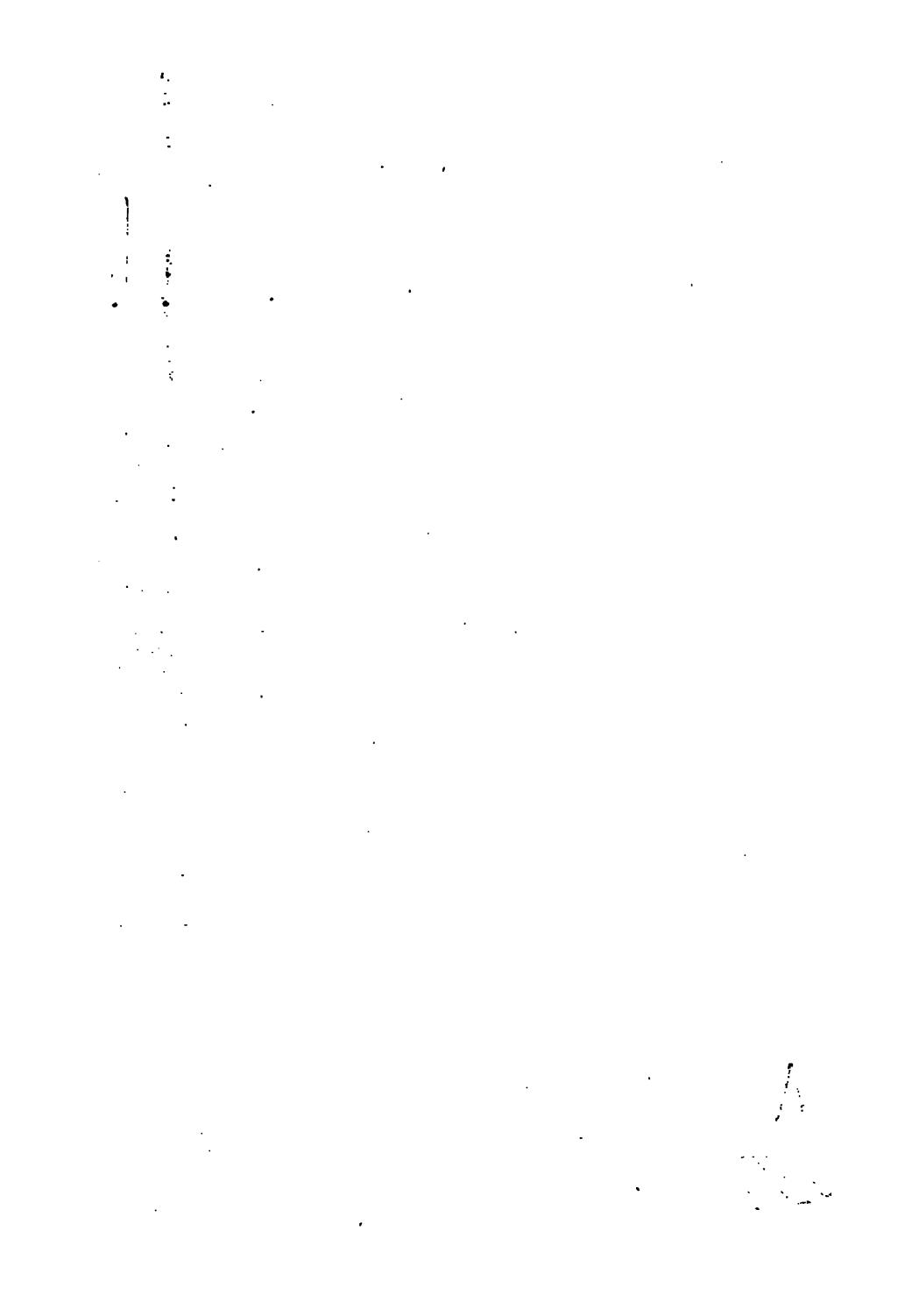
THE

FIVE BABBITTS AT BONNYACRES



WALTER A. DYER





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IN HIS STRONG ARMS HE BORE A BLACK AND WHITE
BURDEN

[Page 239]

THE FIVE BABBITTS AT BONNYACRES

A STORY OF BACK-TO-THE-LANDERS

BY

WALTER A. DYER

Author of "Pierrot, Dog of Belgium," "Gulliver
the Great," etc.

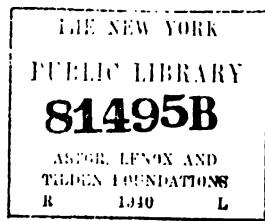
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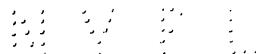


THE FIVE BABBITTS AT BONNYACRES

CHAPTER I

UNCLE JOHN, who was a bachelor, said that he always enjoyed visiting the Babbitts because they were so "familyfied." That was a word he invented to express the Babbitt spirit. It wasn't merely that they were fond of each other; common interests seemed to grow up naturally among them, and a certain family loyalty and cohesiveness seemed to run through all their activities. Harold called it team-work. If it hadn't been for that, I don't believe there would have been any story worth telling about their life at Bonnyacres.

At first there were only four Babbitts. How there came to be five is something we must wait patiently to find out. By way of formal introduction, there was Father Babbitt, who used to be so strong and boyish before he was taken sick; hopeful



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Mother Babbitt, whom no one could help loving; sixteen-year-old Ethel, a little prim, a little serious, inclined to conceal her strongest sentiments, but true-hearted, and, if such things matter, rather pretty; and finally fourteen-year-old Harold, frank, generous, impetuous, sometimes boisterous, sometimes blundering, but generally good-natured and getting wiser every day.

That, I think, sums up the Babbitts well enough, for they were comfortable, every-day sort of people, with nothing brilliant or showy about them, but just hearty, wide-awake American folks such as you would like for next-door neighbors.

Ever since Ethel could remember, the Babbitts had lived in the same house in Elton, a Massachusetts city of some 60,000 inhabitants. It was a pretty house on shady High Street, with a smooth lawn in front, two fine maple trees, and syringa and weigela bushes. There was a bay window in the sitting-room, beside which a great lilac bush bloomed each year in May. Behind the house was a croquet ground, a vegetable garden in which Father took a vast amount of pleasure, and a huge



old Red Astrakhan tree from one of whose branches a rope swing had hung for years and years.

The Babbitt home was open to the sunshine on all sides, but it was warmed even more by the glow of love and happiness within. Very little had ever occurred to cloud that happiness until Father Babbitt was taken sick. Then everything seemed to change. Dr. Knight pronounced it a severe case of pneumonia. For weeks that winter Father lay in the dimly lighted room upstairs, and something awful seemed to be trying to crowd its way into that peaceful home. Mother went quietly about the house, patient and uncomplaining, but silent and careworn. Harold's big eyes followed her with questioning dread, and he never laughed or shouted about the house any more. Ethel closed her piano and her lips, and no one knew the anxiety that was in her heart. Some days, as she came home from school, it seemed as though she were walking in some horrible nightmare, and she dreaded to enter the house for fear of what might have happened.

But Dr. Knight, aided by Father's constitution and Mother's tender and constant nursing, won the

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fight at last, and the glad day came, in late February, when Ethel and Harold came home from school to find their father sitting up in the sunny bay window in the sitting-room. His face lay against the pillows wan and thin—oh, so thin—and his voice was weak, but he was really getting better, and he was smiling. In his hand he held a copy of Ethel's High School paper, *The Palladium*. She ran to him and kissed him on the forehead.

“Oh, Father!” That was all she could think of to say.

“I've just been reading your little story in *The Palladium*, Ethel,” said Father. “A very sweet little story. We should be proud to have an authoress in the family.”

It was like Father to speak of something like that, and not of himself at all. Ethel's eyes filled with tears, but she winked them back and smiled up at him from the hassock at his feet.

They were all very happy that afternoon, and Harold was all for organizing some sort of celebration. His spirits had risen like a cork in water. But his mother restrained him.

"No, dear," she said. "We must keep Father quiet a little longer."

As the days passed, and February drifted into March, Harold found it increasingly difficult to understand why the hour for restraint had not passed. At last, one day, something was said that made him suspicious. He went to his mother and questioned her.

"Tell me, Mother," he said, "isn't Father getting well fast enough?"

She sat down in her low rocking-chair, where she had mended and darned so many evenings, and drew him to her.

"I must tell you about it, Harold, dear," she said, "for it is something we shall all have to consider together very soon. The danger of his sickness is past and he will gradually get stronger, but Dr. Knight says he must never go back to his hard, confining work again. It might kill him, and he could never get strong and well again. The pneumonia has left him with a very weak heart, as it sometimes does, and if we are to keep Father with us, we must all get together to persuade him

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to rest and live quietly. Dr. Knight says he must take it easy and live as much as possible in the open air, avoiding all chance of over-exertion."

"And give up his position?" asked Harold.

Mother nodded.

The practical difficulties of the situation began to loom large in Harold's mind.

"But what shall we do for a living?" he asked in alarm.

"That is something," she said, "which we must talk over."

At first Father was a little inclined to be obstinate. To give up his work is a serious thing for any man, and Father had a deep sense of responsibility toward his family. It made him very blue, and it required their combined efforts to persuade him that it was the only way. At last he surrendered and sent in his resignation to the firm.

The acceptance of the resignation came in an unexpected manner. On the following Sunday afternoon, while the family were gathered in the sitting-room, the doorbell rang, and Maggie, the Babbitt maid, admitted three men. They were old

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associates of Father Babbitt's—men whom he had known and worked with for years.

"Why, this is good of you," cried Father, leaning forward in his chair. "Come right in and sit down."

"We thought we'd come this afternoon," said Mr. Hendricks, who acted as spokesman, "so as not to keep you up in the evening."

There was an air of mystery about the three men which made the family wonder what was to follow.

"We've been sent to convey to you the good wishes of all your fellow-workers, Mr. Babbitt," said Mr. Hendricks. "I don't believe you know how much they all think of you. Every one of them will miss you and will be deeply interested in your future welfare, including the members of the firm. And every one of them has signed this paper and has contributed to this little token of their regard."

Mr. Babbitt could not speak at first. He opened the envelope that Mr. Hendricks handed him. It contained an expression of hearty good-will signed by a long column of names, and a check for \$500.

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“But I can’t take this,” protested Father Babbitt, when he had mastered his emotion. “I can’t accept money, Hendricks.”

“It’s no use, old man,” returned Mr. Hendricks, with a smile. “You’ll have to. We talked of putting it in some other form, but couldn’t agree on anything. We concluded that the money could be better spent by you than by any one else. If you refuse it, you’ll mortally offend a hundred friends. You must accept it in the spirit in which it is given.”

Father looked at Mother. Her heart was deeply touched by this mark of appreciation and affection for her husband, and her eyes were brimming. Nearly all of the Babbitts’ ready money had gone to pay the doctor and the nurse and the druggist, but Mother did not think of that. She only thought of the spirit which prompted the gift, and she saw that the only thing to do was to accept it. She nodded to Father, smiling through her tears. Harold felt no such compunctions.

“Bully!” he cried, and danced around the table. “All right, Hendricks,” said Father Babbitt.

“ Some day when I’m less upset I’ll try to thank you all properly.”

“ Isn’t it lovely! ” said Ethel, after the men had gone.

“ Well,” said Father, with a sigh, “ we’ve burned our bridges behind us.”

They were all thoughtful and silent for a few minutes. Then Ethel asked, “ Have you thought of what we can do, Father? ”

“ Have you, Mother? ” he asked in turn, looking over at her.

“ I suppose,” she replied, “ that we’ve all thought of the same thing.”

“ Bonnyacres? ” asked Father.

Mother nodded.

And now I must tell you something about Bonnyacres, for this story is about the Babbitts and Bonnyacres.

Bonnyacres was a farm of some eighty acres lying up among the Massachusetts hills about two miles from the little town of Devon. It had been in the Babbitt family for several generations, and Father had long ago made arrangements with Uncle

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John and with Uncle Robert and Aunt Jane so that he owned it all, clear and unencumbered, except for one mortgage of \$1,000 which he had allowed to stand. Father had been born and spent his boyhood there, and the Babbitts all knew the place well because of summer vacations spent there. It was not a very fertile or productive farm, but just such a one as you can find in many parts of the country. It had been allowed to run down a good deal since the time when Grandfather Babbitt kept his dairy herd there, but for a number of years it had given a living to several successive families of tenants to whom Father Babbitt had rented it.

The present incumbents were a family named Hovey. They had been good tenants, on the whole, but during the winter Father Babbitt had received a letter from Mr. Hovey stating that he had obtained an offer of a position in a shop in Holyoke, and as he was tired of trying to make anything out of New England farming, he had decided to accept it. The position would be open for him, he said, about the first of May, and the matter of securing a new tenant had been much on Father Babbitt's mind.

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Now it seemed as though the change had been arranged providentially for their convenience.

The Babbitts did not decide hastily to go into farming as a means of livelihood. Bonnyacres had never been a really profitable farm since Grand-father Babbitt's day. It was a rather rocky farm, as so many New England farms are, and the soil needed much renovation to make it very productive. Father Babbitt knew enough about farming from his boyhood experience to realize that. Bumper crops had never been one of the boasts of Bonnyacres, and satisfactory results could only be obtained by the hardest kind of hard work. It was an entirely different proposition from raising apples in Oregon, or hogs and alfalfa in Oklahoma, or corn in Iowa, but Father Babbitt had always had a good deal of faith in the essential strength of the New England soil if handled properly, and he believed that western Massachusetts farming could be made to pay because of the nearness of good markets for the produce. He was not blinded to the fact, however, that results could not be expected in one year, or even two.

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All this he explained at a family council held one Saturday evening in March. He also pointed out that their income from other sources would be very small, and that they were none of them accustomed to living under farm conditions, with very little to spend for the necessities of life and nothing for the luxuries. He did not want to discourage them, but he didn't wish them to have any falsely rosy back-to-the-land ideas.

"We all love the country," he said, "but farm life isn't all sunrises and apple blossoms."

Harold's optimism was not to be dampened by any such talk. He had roseate visions of making a fortune for the family with pigs and turkeys and growing crops. Mother and Ethel, however, though they faced the situation bravely and hopefully, understood better what it would mean.

"What shall we do with Maggie?" asked Ethel. Maggie was the maid-of-all-work who had presided over the Babbitt kitchen ever since the children could remember.

"I've been talking with Maggie," said Mother Babbitt. "She cried when she heard we were going,

and I felt pretty badly, too. I knew we should be unable to pay her wages any longer, but I tried to think of some way in which we could manage to take her with us. But she said she wouldn't want to go, anyway—that she didn't believe she could stand it to live so far from town. You know Maggie is no longer young, and her daughter, whose husband has been doing very well, I hear, has been begging her for a long time to give up her work and go to live with her. I think she would have left before if Father hadn't been taken sick. So I guess we shall have to say good-by to Maggie."

"And do all the housework ourselves?" asked Ethel doubtfully. She had never loved housework, and Mother knew it.

"I have done it before, dear," said Mother, "and I guess I can again."

Ethel leaned over and took her mother's hand. "Not you, Mother—we," she said, and they all knew she meant it.

"Now," said Father, "before we decide anything more, we must check up our finances and strike a

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trial balance. In the first place, we must remember that there will be no salary. The five hundred dollars I would like to use for moving expenses and farm equipment and repairs, holding the balance in the bank for future necessary expenditures for the farm. So we can't count on that for living expenses. I guess we can scrape up a few dollars between us to stock up the pantry at the start, and that's about all. Now, then, Ethel, you get a pencil and paper and we'll see where we stand."

When she was ready, Father continued:

"To live economically on a farm," he said, "we must depend largely on a cow, chickens, and vegetable garden. That means a good cow that will give enough cream for all our butter, and a big enough garden to supply the table for winter as well as summer. Not half of those old-time farmers have gardens worth mentioning, and they don't seem to realize what a difference it makes in their living. The first cost of those things, and the price of a horse to take us to town and do the farm work, will have to come out of the five hundred. This house we own clear of mortgages. It is in good

repair and in a good location, and we should be able to rent it easily."

The idea of renting the old home to strangers was painful to all, but they said nothing.

"What will that bring?" asked Ethel.

"I should say \$50 a month," said Father. "Put it down \$600 for the year. Then I have a few good, sound investments which I have not been obliged to touch. Those bring in about \$450 a year. That makes \$1050, and as we can't expect much of any money income from the farm the first year, that must represent our total assets. Now as to liabilities. Taxes on the two places amount to about \$120. Fire insurance and my life insurance total about the same amount. Upkeep and repairs on the two places you might put down as \$100. Is there anything else?"

"Who will do the work, Father?" asked Mother.

"We must divide that up," said he, "but we can leave that for some future conference. Now that you speak of it, though, there are some things that we can't do ourselves." He said this with a little sigh. "We may be lucky enough to do a little

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swapping off with neighbors for labor, and we must try constantly to keep down that item of expense. It often makes all the difference between a paying and a losing proposition. Still, there's the plowing and the haying, and I suppose a good many other things. Perhaps you'd better put down another hundred for help. Now how do we stand?"

"First," broke in Mother, "let me ask whether the \$500 will surely be enough to start on."

"I think so," said Father. We own the farm wagon and implements, such as they are, and I don't believe we shall have to buy any more at first. But we'll say \$25 for new equipment, \$150 for a horse, \$60 for a cow (trust me to get one for that), and \$25 for chickens, etc. Mother has an estimate for moving expenses, and it comes to \$80. How much does that make, Ethel?"

"\$340," said Ethel.

"You see the \$500 will cover it safely," said Father, "but we musn't spend any of it foolishly. Now, then, the balance sheet."

Ethel handed it to him, and it looked like this:

Income:

Rent	\$ 600
Investments	450
	<hr/>
Total	\$1050

Expenses:

Interest on farm mortgage.	\$ 50
Taxes	120
Insurance	120
Repairs, etc.	100
Help	100
	<hr/>
Total	\$ 490

Balance of income over expenses, \$560.

"Of course," said Father, "that is just a rough estimate, but it shows us that we shan't be able to spend much over \$10 a week for food and clothing and everything else."

The cautious Ethel looked a little terrified.
"Do you think we can ever do it?" she asked.

"We can try," said Mother.

Indeed, the more they thought the matter over, the less possible appeared any alternative. It was Bonnyacres or nothing, and much as they all loved the old farm, they looked forward to their new

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problems with misgivings. Even Harold began to see the seriousness of it. Still, Father had said that industrious people couldn't starve on a farm. There was some comfort in that.

But harder than all was the prospect of leaving the old home where they had all been so happy. They didn't talk much about this; they couldn't; but the thought of it was uppermost in the heart of each one of them, and a shadow hung over the household that not even Mother could dispel. She and Father had spent the greater part of their married life there, and as she passed from room to familiar room, touching each well-loved object as a mother handles the clothing and toys of a child who has died, her lips would tremble in spite of her and the tears come into her eyes.

On the whole, though, I think Ethel suffered the most, though in silence. Beneath her usually calm exterior she hid a very real and deep sentiment for her home. Then, too, she knew she must leave the little circle of High School friends with whom she had become very popular because of her sweet disposition. At night she would cry herself

to sleep sometimes, but never for the world would she have let Father or Mother know of it.

As for Harold, he had his ups and downs of mood. He seldom complained, for Mother had told him he must be a man for Father's sake, but he was often silent and unhappy. Then, suddenly, there would come over him a sense of the adventurousness of the new undertaking, and he would begin planning with zest.

One day at dinner, near the end of it all, when they were all rather silent and preoccupied, Harold broke out with an exclamation which brought them the healing balm of laughter.

"Gee, folks," he cried suddenly, with his mouth half full of potato, "I'm going to be a farmer, and have mud on my boots all I want to."

CHAPTER II

“**H**AVE you ever heard of efficiency?” asked Father Babbitt one evening in early April, as the family sat around the table in the sitting-room after supper.

“Sure,” responded Harold. “That’s what the German army has.”

“Some Americans have it, too,” said Father, with a smile. “It isn’t confined to any one nation. In fact, I sometimes think American business men have too much of it. Life shouldn’t consist entirely of getting things done; it seems to leave no time for many of the more enjoyable and elevating things. But when you undertake a serious problem, scientific efficiency has its value, and I’m inclined to think we should apply some of its principles to our farming.”

The other members of the family were all interested, for they had been giving a good deal of thought of late to the practical problems confront-

ing them. As the time for leaving approached, and the crocuses bloomed in front of the piazza, they began to realize that the time for the sowing of seed was at hand, and that they must plunge at once into the work of the farm on their arrival at Bonnyacres.

It had been decided that Ethel and Harold should give up school for the rest of that year, in order to be able to take a fuller part in the making and support of the new home, and they were both eager to begin. Father was able to be up and dressed now, and to walk around a little, and though still very weak, he seemed more like his energetic self. He had taken his place as the leader of the enterprise, both because he was the head of the family and because he was the only one who knew the least thing about farming and farm life.

"I think," he continued, "that we should introduce something like a division of labor at the farm. We've got to do most of the work ourselves, and there'll be enough of it, I promise you. Each one of us must do his or her full share, and it isn't too

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soon to consider what that share shall be. We don't want to be treading on one another's toes. Organized work always goes more smoothly than that which is not organized."

"Let me get a pencil and paper," said Ethel. "I can always think and remember things better if I write them down. I wish, Father, that you would sum up the farm work for us. I've thought of so many things that I'm bewildered. Harold, please don't joggle the table."

"All right, sis," replied Harold, "only I have to joggle when I write."

"And what are you writing so busily?" asked Mother.

"I'm figuring," said Harold. "If a hen lays an egg a day, 200 days in the year, 100 hens will lay 20,000 eggs. That's over 1,666 dozen. At fifty cents a dozen, that would be \$833.33 in a year. If we had 200 hens——"

"Hold up," said Father, with a laugh. "You'll soon have us so rich that we won't know what to do with our money. That's the way a good many back-to-the-landers figure. But how about feed,

which is pretty high a good deal of the time? How about the cost of equipment? How about the labor? How about low prices for eggs when the hens are laying best? How about roup and other troubles? No, son, this is no get-rich-quick game. We've got to feel our way along and learn as we go."

"Then what can we do?" asked Harold, a little crestfallen.

"Well," replied Father, "we'll sum it up as Ethel suggests, and then consider the various operations under separate heads.

"In the first place," he continued, "there are two main divisions—the home and the farm. Each will require our attention. The farm must be made to minister as far as possible to the support of the home before we can think of taking profits from it as a business, and the home must be so managed as to be as little of a burden as possible to the farm. An expensive establishment would soon eat our little farm all up.

"Suppose we elect me farm manager and Mother home manager. I know she will do her part all

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right. She knows more about domestic economy than I do about agriculture. Ethel can be Mother's assistant, and Harold mine."

"But, Father," protested Ethel, with disappointment in her voice, "I want to help on the farm, too. I will help Mother, of course, but I should enjoy the outside work so much more than the house-work, and I know there are lots of things I could do."

"Of course there are, my dear," said Father, patting her hand, "and do them you shall if you wish. There will be more than enough to go around. But to proceed with our summary. First there are the chores, which are necessary before all else. The cow and horse and chickens must be fed, the barn and poultry house kept clean, the cow pastured and milked regularly, and Mother must be kept supplied with wood for the fires. I used to do these chores when I was a boy, and I guess Harold and I can manage them between us. I can milk, and Harold can learn later if he wants to. In this way we shall supply Mother with milk, eggs, and fuel. Mother and Ethel must learn how

to take care of the milk and cream and make butter."

"Heading 1, the house," said Ethel. "Mother and I responsible. Heading 2, the chores; Father and Harold. What's next?"

"Next in importance," continued Father, "is the kitchen garden. In the garden we shall hope to raise enough green vegetables to supply the table all summer, and turnips, carrots, winter squash, cabbage, parsnips, onions, etc., for winter use. It may also include berries and small fruits. The potatoes will come under another head. Now who will be the gardener? I have always had a good garden here, you know, and I can still direct operations, but I'm afraid the actual work of it might prove too much for me at first, and if we go into general farming at all, Harold will have his hands full there."

"Then I'll be the gardener," cried Ethel, her eyes shining. "I've been thinking of that. I know I could do it. And I can put up some of the summer vegetables and berries for winter use, too. They're much nicer than eating turnips and onions

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all the time. I've sent for some bulletins on preserving from the Department of Agriculture at Washington and from Cornell Experiment Station, and I'm going to learn all about it."

"Fine!" said Father with satisfaction.

"Heading 3," said Ethel, "kitchen garden, Father and Ethel; preserves, Mother and Ethel."

"Finally," continued Father, "there are the farm crops, and these fall into two subdivisions. There are the crops we must raise to feed ourselves and our stock, and crops for market. At first I think it would be our wisest plan to try to raise only what we need for ourselves, but to raise plenty, and then we can sell any surplus. This will give us plenty to look out for the first year. Two acres of potatoes are nearly as easy to manage as one, and that should give us all we can eat for a year, with plenty of seed for the following season and some to sell. Hay for the horse and cow, and also bedding, must be gotten in at the proper time. I am convinced that it doesn't pay to try to raise oats and other grain at Bonnyacres. The land isn't suited to it, and we have no facilities for harvesting and

threshing it. Grain can be grown more economically on a large scale, and we can buy it as cheap as we can raise it. We might raise some corn, though, as an experiment. The farm has produced good corn in the past, and it would cut down the feed bill a lot. Then there are fifty or sixty old apple trees on the place that would yield a good crop if they hadn't been neglected. I think it would pay us to try to do something with them. That should give us apples for our own use and some to sell. Hay, potatoes, corn, and apples, I think, should be our main crops at first. Later on we can perhaps specialize in something that will bring in more money."

"But," protested Harold, "there are months and months to make money in."

"They're not so many, after all, Harold," responded his father. "On the farm Autumn seems to come before you know it. No, economy and not profit must be our watchword this year. We must bend all our efforts to making a living, raising food. It will be time enough to discuss the second year when this one's over."

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“But potatoes and corn and hay—my! that seems a tremendous undertaking to me,” said Mother. “How can you ever manage it?”

“We shall have to hire help, no doubt,” replied Father, “though Harold is still an unknown quantity. He is strong and large for his age, and work won’t hurt him. He may be able to help a lot.”

“Hm!” sniffed Harold. “You just watch me. Say, I can run that farm. Why can’t I be manager?”

“Maybe you can,” said his father. “Maybe you can. We’ll have to see how you like aching shoulders and blistered hands. For the present, I think you’d better be assistant manager.”

“You see!” retorted Harold.

“Heading 4,” read Ethel, “farm crops. Father and Harold. Potatoes, hay, corn, and apples.”

“I bet I can raise corn,” persisted the boy. “I read of a fellow only twelve years old down in Virginia that raised 209 bushels of corn on an acre, and it cost him only \$22 to do it. He won a prize and made a lot of money.”

“Yes,” said Father Babbitt, “the Corn Club boys

all over the country are doing remarkable things, but I think you will find that most of them have better soil than ours. However, it shows that a boy can often beat his father. Go to it, son, only don't be discouraged if you fall a little short of the record mark."

"Boys make money with pigs, too," asserted Harold. "And say, Father, I want to set out some apple trees, too. May I? I read that our Massachusetts apples beat the world for flavor. Oregon apples aren't in it with them, only the Eastern farmers don't know how to grow them. There's money in that, after they get going."

"It'll do no harm to set out a young orchard, surely," said Father. "Our soil is better suited to apples than to almost anything else. I never tasted better apples than those from our old, neglected trees. By the way, you seem to have been doing some agricultural reading."

Harold looked over at his sister and grinned.

"We both have," said she. "I got some books from the library and Mr. Emerson gave me a lot of old farm papers. Then Harold and I sent

to Washington for a bushel of bulletins. Look here."

She went to the little closet beside the mantel and produced a big bundle of Farmers' Bulletins, on all sorts of subjects from canning to bees.

"They sent us a list to select from, and we thought we might as well get plenty."

Mr. Babbitt smiled. "Well, there's lots of good reading in those," said he, looking them over. "Let's see—'Pruning,' 'Turkeys,' 'Pig Management,' 'Farm Buttermaking,' 'Blackberry Culture,' 'The Farmer's Income,'—why, I should think you had most everything. More, I guess, than you'll be able to digest at present. But take them with you. They will prove invaluable for reference later."

Father Babbitt was able to add to these some pamphlets on soils, hay, and other subjects from among his own effects, and Harold and Ethel had plenty to keep them busy during the next week or two. A good deal of it was unrelated knowledge, but some of it stuck, and they began to get a better idea of the principles of agriculture. Harold was

not a patient student by any means, but he had a practical mind, and anything interested him which had to do with the turning of the wealth of the soil into hard cash. School books had never held his attention as these bulletins did.

Meanwhile, under Mother's generalship, preparations for moving had been going steadily on. Pictures and curtains were taken down, furniture and china were wrapped and crated with Maggie's help, and the house began to take on a bare and forlorn aspect. It was a good thing they were all so busy; they had hardly time to think of the sad side of it. It seemed as though they would never emerge from the confusion.

But the day of departure came at last, and it was a sorrowful one for the Babbitts. Maggie had left for her daughter's the night before, and there had been tears on both sides. The movers were busy in the morning, and Father Babbitt had left the keys of the house with the real estate agent. The trunks had gone on ahead, and at last the carriage drove up to the gate. Father Babbitt was made as comfortable as possible, and the others climbed in after

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him. Then, as the carriage started off for the station, they all turned and said good-by to the dear old home.

Ethel will never forget that moment. Through swimming eyes it seemed to her she could see the whole of her happy childhood left behind. There stood the old house, silent and deserted save for the moving men—red chimneys, piazza, bay window, maple trees, lawn, flowers, everything that she had come to love so dearly. As they turned the corner she felt that it was all gone, gone forever, that she was a child no longer but a young woman, with all a woman's cares and responsibilities. A great pity for herself and her departed girlhood filled her breast.

Then she became conscious of a tremor in her mother's shoulders. She turned about and found her mother with her head resting on her hand, her eyes hidden, crying silently. Suddenly it occurred to her how selfish she was. She was still young; all of life was ahead of her; but poor Mother—

Quickly she dried her own eyes and laid her hand gently on her mother's arm.

"It's all for Father," she whispered, and Mother looked up and smiled at her through her tears.

During the railway trip to Devon, after the last well remembered landmark of Elton had faded from view, Ethel made an effort to be cheerful, but it was the irrepressible Harold who brought sunshine back to the party. His spirits rose with the onrushing of the train. The wheels seemed to be saying, over and over, "Bonnyacres, Bonnyacres, Bonnyacres," and Harold's young eyes were filled with a vision of fruitful fields and orchards, flocks and herds. He chattered on incessantly about the farm and the wonderful things they were going to accomplish there.

"He must have his grandfather's blood in him," said Father Babbitt. "Grandfather Babbitt loved a cow better than he loved most men."

"I think," said Harold, "that I could love a pig, even a muddy, grunty old hog. Yes, I do."

Mr. Hovey was waiting with the surrey at the station in Devon when they arrived, and Ethel

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patted the nose of Kit, Mr. Hovey's old black mare. Father Babbitt was weary with the journey.

"But it's only a little way farther," said he.

"The wife said ye'd be tired," said Mr. Hovey. "So she sent along these old pillers an' things. Guess we can make ye comf'table."

Mr. Hovey was deluged with questions by Ethel and Harold, who sat on the front seat with him, as they jogged out of town and along the muddy country road behind old Kit. He seemed tremendously amused by Harold, who wanted to know whether the apple trees had been sprayed yet and how much manure there was at the barn.

"Say, ye talk just like a farmer, don't ye?" said he. "But just wait till ye git between the plow handles on one of them stony pieces. That'll take some o' the farmer out of ye, I reckon."

They passed by the Devon picnic grove, through the half-mile strip of woods, with the brook babbling in the ravine far below, up the long hill, and out again into the open farming country. All fell silent, for they were approaching Bonnyacres at last.

Just beyond the old Emory farmhouse they came upon the northwest corner of the farm, with its big sugar maple. Harold rose to his feet in order to look across the stubble field toward the house and barn, nestling comfortably among hickory, elm, and maple trees, with one big, brittle black locust overhanging the house. The sight gave them all a thrill. This was to be home. Somehow it didn't seem like home yet, with the memory of Elton fresh in their minds, but it was a well loved place already.

They passed by the six-acre field on the right and the Norton farmhouse close to the road on the left, rattled over the little bridge that spanned the brook, and turned into the crossroad which cut Bonnyacres in two. On the left of this crossroad, which Harold had dubbed Babbitt Pike, beyond a low-lying piece of swale, stood the house. The barn was directly across from it on the other side of the road, which had always seemed to them like their own private drive. Straight ahead, to the south, beyond the buildings, lay the rest of the farm, fields, mowing, and pasture, with most of the old apple trees behind the barn, and the wood lot, with its few tower-

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ing pines, and the barren sand hill over at the south-east corner of the farm.

It all looked very lovely and peaceful as it lay there in the afternoon sun—the brown, rolling fields, the old stone walls, the tall trees, the gray barn, and the low white house. Father drew a long breath. Somehow, in spite of all the problems that lay before them, it seemed to him to mean rest and strength, and his mind wandered back to the days of his boyhood, when he was just such a zestful chap as Harold.

As Mr. Hovey drew up old Kit before the house, the front door opened and the ample form of Mrs. Hovey appeared, clad in a big, brown, checked apron. A wide smile lighted up her ruddy face, and she shouted greetings to them all and bade them enter. One by one they alighted, and Mr. Hovey helped Father down and into the house.

“I’m so glad to find you looking so well,” said Mother to Mrs. Hovey. “And how is Bollivar?” The head of a small boy with a serious, wistful face, peeped around from behind Mrs. Hovey. “I had almost forgotten about Bollivar.”

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“Hello, Bollivar!” shouted Harold, dashing forward. But the head had mysteriously disappeared, and there was no sign or sound of the body to which it belonged.

CHAPTER III

OLIVER GOLDSMITH BROWN was the somewhat formidable name that had been given to the boy who had disappeared so mysteriously and completely upon the arrival of the Babbits at Bonnyacres. That his name was not Hovey was due to the simple fact that he was not the Hoveys' child. He was an orphan and a state ward.

In Massachusetts, as in many other states, the orphans whose support is undertaken by the state authorities are, so far as possible, not placed in institutions, but are "farmed out," as the expression is, in private families. The state inspectors see to it that the children thus placed out do not suffer from lack of food, clothing, and care, and as a rule they are treated with kindness. The persons who act as guardians receive a regular sum of money from the state for board, clothing, and medical care, and this sum, together with the help which the child can render in the work of the farm

or household, makes it profitable for a good many families to keep one or two.

Oliver Goldsmith Brown, who was more commonly called Bollivar, perhaps at his own request, was nearly twelve years old, and he had lived with the Hoveys for about seven years, both at Bonnyacres and at a previous residence. He was large and strong for his age, and a bright pupil in school, but he was a shy, unapproachable chap who had never outgrown his feeling of strangeness in his surroundings. The Babbitts, of course, knew him well, by reason of their not infrequent visits to Bonnyacres, and yet they had never really been able to make friends with him. Harold had always found him too serious and shy as a playfellow, and his search for him now was quite in vain. At length Harold returned to the house where the rest of the family were talking with Mr. and Mrs. Hovey.

“Yes,” Mr. Hovey was saying, “we figure to leave here about the first o’ May. By that time I can git things purty well started for ye on the farm. I’ve got a good job waitin’ for me—an inside job—

an' I ain't sorry to quit farmin' an' take it, though we shall be sorry to leave Bonnyacres an' not see any more o' you folks. I guess I wa'n't never meant to be a farmer."

"Do you expect to live right in the city?" inquired Mother Babbitt.

"Yas, I guess so," replied Mr. Hovey. "We did talk some o' takin' a small place outside o' town, where we could have a garden an' a few chickens, maybe, but we've about given up that idee. Ma thinks she'd like to try livin' in a flat for a change."

"Bollivar will have better schools in Holyoke," suggested Mother Babbitt.

"I was comin' to that," said Mr. Hovey. "I don't believe we can keep Bollivar. I guess he knows it, an' that's what makes him so strange lately. I don't blame the poor kid, knocked around from pillar to post, with no home of his own, an' no knowin' how long he'll stay in one place. But I guess it can't be helped. We've talked it over consid'able, an' we don't see how we can keep him in town. It would cost us more there for his keep, an' there won't be no work he can help with."

They were all silent for a little while. It was not difficult to appreciate the position of Mr. and Mrs. Hovey, and they were under no obligation to keep the child. They were a good, honest, hard-working couple, and Mrs. Hovey, especially, was warm-hearted, but they had been brought up in a hard school themselves, and though they had always been kind to Bollivar, they did not seem to feel any real tenderness or affection for him.

“We’ve always aimed to do our duty by the boy, an’ now I guess he’ll have to go back on the state. Maybe they’ll find a better home for him than what this has been.”

While Mr. Hovey was doing up his chores, and Mrs. Hovey was getting supper, the Babbitts had a chance to discuss the situation. Mother and Ethel offered to help Mrs. Hovey, but she would not hear of it.

“You jest set right there,” she insisted, “an’ rest. If ye want to come out in the kitchen to-morrow, I’ll be glad to have ye. But not to-night. You’re tired.”

Harold would have gone out with Mr. Hovey to

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watch the milking and feeding, but his father restrained him.

"Let's all stay here for a little," he said. "This Bollivar business is on my mind."

"I think it's a horrid shame," said Ethel, "to turn him out of the only home he knows, back on the state."

"He's a good boy," said Mother, "and I think a little love might do wonders for him. I think he needs that more than anything else, and he might never get any. I dread seeing those big, sorrowful eyes of his if he has to take his little bundle and leave Bonnyacres."

"We could make him do a lot of the work," said Harold, with youthful heartlessness.

"I reckon he'll earn his keep," said Father Babbitt.

"Oh, Father," protested Mother. "Don't say 'reckon' and 'cal'late.' It sounds so—so rustic."

Father laughed. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," he replied. "I'm getting the farm atmosphere already, you see, and you must be thank-

ful if I acquire nothing worse than habits of rustic speech."

And so the fate of Bollivar was decided, a little hastily, perhaps, but they all seemed to be agreed. That evening they told Mr. and Mrs. Hovey of their intention, and they seemed very glad.

"It takes a load off my conscience," said Mrs. Hovey.

Bollivar was still among the missing. He had stolen into the kitchen to beg a bite of supper from Mrs. Hovey, but had disappeared again.

"He's gone up to bed, I reckon," said Mrs. Hovey. "Maybe he's cryin', though I seldom see him cry. But he'll be around in the mornin', and you can see him then."

In the morning, after breakfast, Father Babbitt, Harold, and Ethel went out with Mr. Hovey on a partial tour of the farm, but Mother Babbitt, pleading a slight weariness, remained behind. In reality she was hoping for an opportunity to talk with Bollivar when the rest of the family were not near by to embarrass him. At length she succeeded.

She had just returned from the rear of the house

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when she saw the boy at the door of the chicken house which was a part of a range of low buildings attached to the barn, including the carriage house and a shed in which farm implements were kept. Bollivar opened the door and let the chickens out, and stood watching them as they hurried over to the lawn in search of bugs and succulent morsels of green grass. Very quietly she stepped over and joined him.

He was bareheaded and a little breeze blew his unkempt brown curls from his forehead. It was rather a good forehead, Mother thought as she approached. In fact, he was a good-looking boy, in spite of the freckles across the bridge of his nose. Only she wished she could see a smile of happiness light up his eyes.

“How many are there?” she asked, as they stood watching the fowls enjoying their freedom.

“Twenty-four,” said Bollivar. He did not run away, but he did not seem to be inclined to talk much.

“They don’t seem to be all one kind,” she said.

"No," he replied. "There are some White Wyandottes and some Rhode Island Reds, and some that aren't anything special, I guess. But they're all good layers. We ate those that weren't."

"How can you tell?" asked Mother.

"Oh," said he, "I know them all, and I know when they go on the nests to lay. I have to watch to see if they get broody, you know. It isn't hard when there are so few."

Mother was quite encouraged that he should be willing to talk at all. After a few more remarks about them, she said, "You like the chickens?"

Bollivar nodded.

"Would you like to stay and take care of them after Mr. and Mrs. Hovey leave?"

He looked up quickly, as though to learn whether she were in earnest. The wistful look went straight to her motherly heart.

"You mean live here with you?" asked Bollivar.

"Yes," she answered. "You could go on just as you have been doing, and we would try to be good to you. Will you?"

"Oh, yes," he cried, his face lighting with

a momentary flush of pleasure. "I didn't know but—"

She wanted to put her arms around him and mother him, but a new embarrassment overcame him. He turned suddenly, and in a moment was gone. She smiled a little as she returned to the house.

"Well," she said to Mrs. Hovey, "I told Bollivar. It wasn't a very satisfactory interview, but I think he is glad."

"Oh, he'll come round all right," asserted Mrs. Hovey.

Meanwhile Mr. Hovey had been showing the others about the place. Harold called it a "seeing Bonnyacres tour," and it seemed to him and Ethel that it was the first time they had really seen it. Previously they had taken very little interest in what things were growing, or where; now they were absorbed in the history of the various fields and their possibilities for the future.

They started at the northwest corner of the farm, where Mr. Hovey had had a field of corn the year before.

"There's about six acres in this piece," he said. "Some of it's fair corn land and some of it ain't. Soil's pretty thin on that knoll, an' that low place needs drainin'. You can see how wet it is now—reg'lar brook runnin' down the hill. In summer it's dry, but nothin' gits a good start here. Ought to be a ditch dug, but I never got around to it."

They went down the hill, crossed the brook on stepping stones, climbed the opposite bank where the hickories grew, and clambered over the old stone wall into the lot back of the barn.

"When we get rich," remarked Father Babbitt, "and turn Bonnyacres into a show place, I'm going to have all these old walls relaid and made as good as new."

"I'd sell 'em," said Mr. Hovey, laconically. "You could git a good price for 'em for buildin' purposes. They're no good as fences an' they take up a heap o' room on the farm. You can't mow or plow close to 'em, an' they're just a breedin' place for weeds an' woodchucks. Look at them wild cherries; that's where all the tent caterpillars come from that git on the apple trees."

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"You are right, Mr. Hovey," said Father, "but I'm going to keep the stone walls nevertheless. You see I was born on this place, and we're only a lot of sentimental farmers, anyway."

Mr. Hovey shook his head; he could make no sense of that point of view.

"These are the old apple trees," said Father to Harold. "Or rather, most of them are here. The rest are scattered about along by the road and back of the house. Those by the road are Greenings. These are mostly Baldwins, and used to bear fine fruit. There are some other varieties here, too. We'll have to tackle them all, I expect, and watch them next fall to decide which ones had better be cut down. They're in pretty bad shape, you see. Need a lot of pruning, but I'm afraid it's too late for that this year."

Mr. Hovey's cow came plodding up at this point, and Ethel, after a little encouragement, was induced to scratch the gentle creature's head.

"Is this pasture all right?" asked Mr. Babbitt.

"It's enough for one cow most of the season. It's near the barn, an' I've fixed these fences up so

she can't git out. But along about September she has it pretty much et off, an' I have to stake her out or put her down in the south pasture."

They climbed another wall and headed south across a meadow, which was beginning to look green.

"There's about six acres in this piece," said Mr. Hovey, "an' it's the best mowin' on the place, except the piece south of the house."

"Here," he continued, as they climbed still another wall, "is what they call the four-acre lot."

"I remember," said Father Babbitt. "My father used to raise wonderful corn here."

"Well, I reckon he couldn't do it now," said Mr. Hovey. "Soil's all run out. The last man that grew corn here never even seeded the piece down, an' you can't cut much more'n two ton o' hay offen it in a good year. I plowed an acre of it down at the lower end last fall, thinkin' I might try potatoes or somethin' there, but I dunno. It'll need a heap o' fertilizer."

"Lime, too, maybe," said Father Babbitt.

"Very likely," said Mr. Hovey. "I don't know much about lime. It's always been too expensive for me to use."

They turned to the left and approached the cross-road, there being nothing further south on that side but the big, old south pasture, full of blueberry bushes and seedling pines, running down to Sapphire Brook, the southern boundary of the farm, with a thicket of white pines, birches, and mountain laurel in the ravine. They passed through a bar-way and walked on down the road until the long sand hill appeared on the left.

"Some day," said Mr. Hovey, "after this boy grows up, this may be the most valuable part of the farm. It's growin' up to white pine fast, an' if the blight don't git 'em they're goin' to be worth a heap. The hill ain't good for nothin' else, an' I'd let it just grow up to pines."

"We might help Nature a little," suggested Father, "and set out some seedlings here."

"Good idee," returned the farmer. "Now here at the foot o' the hill, I plowed 'bout an acre last fall. There's no stones here an' it's easy workin'.

Whether it'll grow anything I don't know. Corn, mebbe. Looks pretty thin an' light to me."

As they turned back toward the house they had on their right a dense alder swamp, with a few acres of woodland beyond.

"Some day we'll get after that wood lot," said Father. "It isn't very large, but I fancy it needs thinning badly, and we might get most of our fuel in that way, without slashing down any great part of it."

"Are those tall pines on our land?" asked Ethel. "I've never been clear over there."

"Some on 'em be," said Mr. Hovey. "The line runs right through 'em."

"They're beautiful," said Ethel, gazing at their tall, feathery cones, from which a flock of crows went cawing away.

Presently the brush on their right began to thin out, and there seemed to be a line of division where it began to be short and scrubby.

"I cal'late this was plowed once," said Mr. Hovey, "but it was before my day. Might be a

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good piece o' land, too, but 'twould need a heap o' clearin', an' drainin', too, I reckon."

"What would it be good for?" asked Father Babbitt.

"I dunno," said the farmer. "Ought to make good hay land. Right next here is the best mowin' on the place. Only 'bout two acres of it, though."

They left the road again, walked across the little meadow, and around to the back of the house.

"Here's where I've had my potatoes," said Mr. Hovey. "Seems to be the richest piece, an' I've kep' it up pretty good. Got it pretty free from stone, too."

There were some berry bushes and plum trees not far from the house, an old rhubarb and asparagus bed, and on a little rise at the eastern edge of the farm some grapevines.

"That would be a good place for the garden, wouldn't it?" asked Ethel.

"Sure," said Mr. Hovey with a grin. "But I guess you wouldn't want all of it in garden, would ye? Unless you cal'late to feed the neighborhood."

Ethel did not reply. She had her own ideas on that point.

They did not proceed farther, but stood looking across a low-lying piece of swale toward the main road.

“I guess there’s nothin’ you’d want to do with that,” said Mr. Hovey, “unless you could build an ice pond some time. But over yonder, next the road, there’s a narrer strip—’bout an acre—that ain’t bad. I’ve been cuttin’ grass on it a couple o’ years.”

“Well, I guess we’ve looped the loop,” said Father Babbitt. “This is the longest walk I’ve taken, and I’m a little tired. I think I’d better lie down awhile this afternoon, and this evening we’ll talk it all over and plan our farming.”

“What time is it?” inquired Harold.

“Almost eleven,” said Father, consulting his watch.

“Gee!” said Harold with a long face that made Ethel laugh, “I thought we must be late for dinner.”

CHAPTER IV.

“I THINK Bollivar is too funny for anything,” said Ethel that evening, as she came into the sitting-room after helping Mrs. Hovey with the dishes. “He just came in with some kindlings and I said ‘Hello, Bollivar.’ He pulled off his cap and said ‘Good evening,’ just as stiffly as if we hadn’t known him for years. Then he got red in the face, dropped his kindlings in the box, and hustled out as though he were afraid of me.”

“Perhaps you’ve made a conquest, Ethel,” said her father, smiling.

“Anyway,” said Mother Babbitt, “he seems to have picked up good manners somewhere. I have a feeling that he must have come from nice people. Somehow he seems that way.”

“We must try to find out,” said Father Babbitt, thoughtfully. “Bollivar presents an interesting problem. One might almost call it a mystery.”

“But let’s not question him just yet,” Mother

hastened to suggest. "We must wait till he gets over his shyness. I believe he will. I think he is really much relieved to find that he is going to stay here with us."

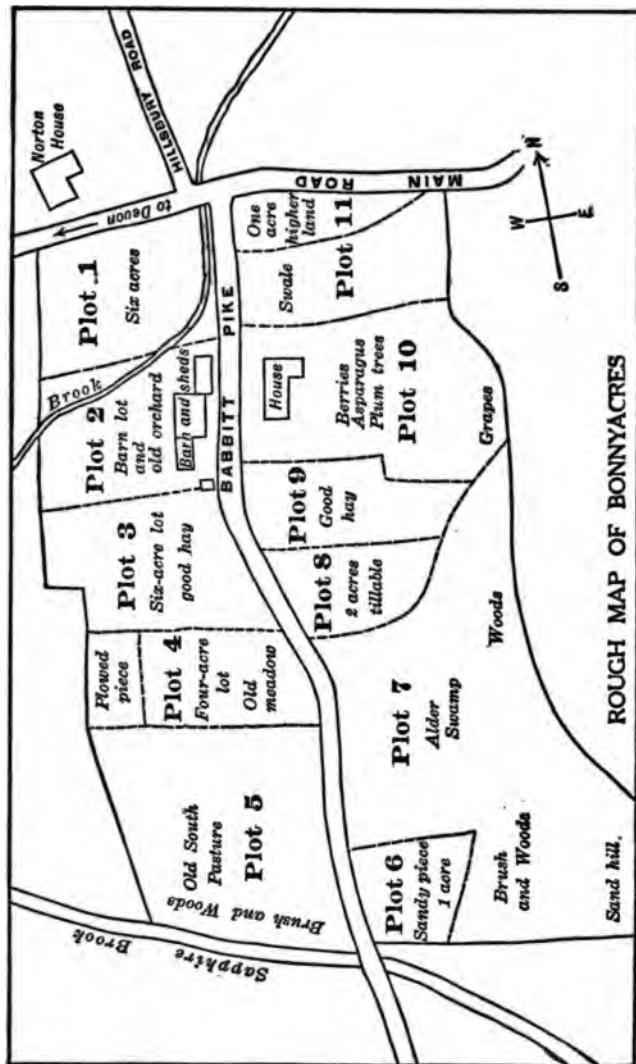
"We must make a place for him among us," said Father. "Let him have his share in the work like the rest of us. Then he will feel as though he were needed here, and he will more quickly become natural and communicative."

"What shall we make him?" asked Harold.
"Manager of the woodpile?"

"We must see what he can do best," said Father.
"That reminds me that we've got to talk over our plans some more. Everybody ready for a family council?"

They all indicated their readiness and gathered about the wood stove, for the evening was chilly.

"In the first place, all take a look at this," said Father, and he produced a sheet of paper bearing strange lines and numerals. "It may not look much like a bird's-eye view of Bonnyacres, but it is intended as a rough map or diagram of the farm. I have numbered the principal fields or sections of



the farm, as you see, beginning with the northwest corner and running around the course of this morning's tour. Number 1 is the six-acre piece where Mr. Hovey had his corn last year. Number 2 is the old orchard back of the barn where he has been pasturing the cow. Number 3 is the six acres of good mowing. Number 4 is the four-acre lot next to it. Number 5 is the old south pasture. Number 6 is the sand hill and the level, sandy piece at its foot. Number 7 is the hopeless portion of the alder swamp and the wood lot. Number 8 is the two acres at the north side of it that we may be able to reclaim. Number 9 is the piece of mowing beside the house. Number 10 is the plot back of the house, and 11 is the swale and the knoll beyond.

"Now as farm manager, I propose the following procedure for this year, and I have Mr. Hovey's approval of the plan. On section Number 1 Harold can set out his young fruit trees, and we'll plant potatoes between the rows. Harold must be largely responsible for this piece."

"Isn't it bad practice to plant anything in a young

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orchard?" asked Ethel. "I thought you ought to let the trees have the whole place to themselves."

"Theoretically that is so," said her father. "Actually, it is a bad economy. The field has to be cultivated anyway for the sake of the trees, and if potatoes are grown on the same land it saves cultivating two fields. Later on it will be bad for the trees, but at first they are such little things that they cannot make use of much space, and if the potatoes are not planted within ten feet of the trees, which ought to be set forty feet apart or so, I don't think they will do a bit of harm. In farming one is obliged to compromise between theory and practice."

"The old orchard, Number 2, and the other old apple trees on the place we can't do much with this year, except spray. We can't spare the fertilizer, and it would hurt them to prune them much now, though it is never the wrong time to cut off water sprouts or suckers. Remember that, Harold, and never leave your jack-knife in the house. I'll show you about pruning suckers in a day or two."

"Field Number 3 we will let alone this year, and

get as much hay as we can from it. Most of Number 4 we will mow also, but the lower part, where Mr. Hovey plowed last fall, we may be able to do something with, though I think we shall have our hands full without it. I should be inclined to lime it, and sow a cover crop on it this fall, in preparation for some crop next year. The soil is in rather poor condition now."

"I don't believe I understand about lime, Father," said Ethel.

"Lime," said her father, "on soils which do not naturally contain it, seems to act in two ways. Not to go too much into the chemistry of it, soil which is moist and which has been neglected is apt to get sour. There is too much acid in it to grow most crops successfully. The lime neutralizes this acid and sweetens the soil. In the second place, soil often has plant food elements in it in a form which the plant cannot make use of. Lime acts on these elements, breaking them up, as we say, and making them available for the plants."

"My! It's all beyond me," said Mother. "I had no idea farming was anything like that."

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“Very often it isn’t,” said Father, with a laugh. “But the farmer who wishes to succeed cannot know too much about the chemistry of the soil. The earth is a wonderful chemical laboratory, just as our bodies are. It may produce foods or poisons, and very often we can do something, if we understand a little of the science of it, to help Nature to be a friend to the growing things instead of an enemy to them. There are a lot of things we don’t understand yet, or at least I don’t—bacterial action and all that—but there is no excuse for our remaining in ignorance.”

“Bacteria—that’s what clover makes, isn’t it, Father?” inquired Ethel, whose recent reading had been confined very largely to agricultural books and bulletins.

“Quite so,” said he. “It is a peculiarity of the legumes—clover, vetch, cow peas, soy beans, etc.—that they produce little knobs or nodules on their roots which contain bacteria. I will show them to you some time. And these wonderful bacteria seem to make it possible for the plants they inhabit to draw nitrogen right out of the air instead of hunting

around in the soil for it. Nitrogen, you know, is one of the most important elements of plant food, the other two most necessary being phosphoric acid and potash. One of the chief duties of lime, by the way, is to free the nitrogen in the soil. Now when one of these leguminous crops is plowed under and decays, it adds the important element of nitrogen to the soil. Gets it out of the air, you see, and puts it into the ground for the next crop to feed on."

"They plow rye and buckwheat under, too, don't they?" asked Harold.

"Yes," said Father, "but for a different purpose. Buckwheat is used chiefly because it is such a rank grower. It kills out the weeds and adds substance or humus to the soil, but it cannot put in any chemical that wasn't there before. The same way with rye, which stays alive all winter. It doesn't add anything, but it holds the fertility and keeps it from washing or evaporating away, and when it is plowed under in the spring it decays and leaves all this fertility in a form best suited to the uses of the new crop.

"Now this lower acre on plot Number 4 needs

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humus and fertility. I should spread manure on it, harrow it in, and then plant rye. Then in the spring the piece may be good for something."

"Why not plant clover, and add nitrogen?" asked Ethel.

"In the first place," said Father, "I am not sure that clover would catch there, as they say. Besides, it takes two years for clover to make enough growth to get the maximum benefit from it. I would plant vetch with the rye, for vetch lives all winter and makes a rank growth. But most of our vetch seed comes from Russia, and on account of the war the price is so high now that I don't believe we can afford it. I think we shall have to get along with manure and rye. The war has also made potash very dear, for that comes mostly from Germany, so that it is harder to grow good potatoes which require potash and must not have too much nitrogen. Stable manure, too, is apt to make potatoes scabby.

"But the discussion of potatoes must wait till another time. We must go on boxing the compass of the farm. Number 5 we will let alone. The flat

piece on Number 6 is very light and sandy, and needs humus more than anything else. So we might sow buckwheat there and see what we can make of it. Turn the buckwheat under in the fall and sow rye. Turn that under in the spring and see what you've got. Number 7 we will let alone. Number 8 I have great hopes of. It was once a pasture, I think, though it looks as though it had been plowed some time. I can't remember. I believe it would make good hay land. We shall have to clear off the brush, dig a ditch or two, plow it in the fall, and fit it for a year or two before seeding it down to grass. I'll explain all that later. Number 9 we will simply mow. Number 10 we will use for Ethel's garden and perhaps for a few potatoes, for there is more land there than she will need. There are also the grapes and berries to be cared for when we get to them. A rank crop of coarse grass and weeds grows on Number 11, and that is fine for bedding for the horse. The knoll by the road looks pretty good to me. Mr. Hovey has been cutting grass there, but I think we might try corn there. I don't know of a better place."

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"It isn't very big, is it?" asked Harold, who had visions of a great field of yellow corn.

"No," admitted his father. "It isn't, but it ought to produce a good many bushels if handled properly. Still, if you want to, you can use the part of Number 10 that Ethel doesn't need."

For some little time the family studied the fascinating diagram. It seemed to the two children in their optimism and enthusiasm as though a magician's wand had already summoned from the soil tasseled corn, luxuriant potatoes, a wonderful garden, and blossoming fruit trees.

"That's right," said Father. "You can't have too much faith in old Mother Earth. But don't forget that she is usually just about as lazy as her children, and she best serves those who labor. It looks well on paper, but the real test is going to come out under the blazing sun when your aching muscles cry out for a rest. Now let's go to bed and dream about it and to-morrow we'll take an inventory of our possessions. Early hours, night and morning, are the farmer's rule, and daylight is his best friend."

The next day, in accordance with Father Babbitt's suggestion, they made the rounds of the barn and buildings, and made a list of the equipment which belonged to them. The barn was in need of repair, but it was roomy and the frame was solid, and Father thought it would serve in its present condition. There was also a corn crib and another outbuilding which Father proposed to clear out and use for apple barrels, garden tools, and various odds and ends. One of the sheds alongside the barn would do for the larger implements.

"There is one thing I want to do," said Father, "which is contrary to the general practice of the neighborhood. I want to keep everything under cover that can rust or in any way be injured by the weather. I don't suppose any one has ever computed the total loss caused by leaving plows, harrows, etc., out of doors, but it must run into the millions."

The chicken house wasn't much like the pictures in the bulletins, and Father agreed that they ought to have a new one some day, but this one was well ventilated and large enough for fifty hens, and he

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thought it would do for the present. With Mr. Hovey's help and Harold's, however, he did build some new nest boxes that very day.

That evening the family held an adjourned meeting in the sitting-room. The first thing on the program was an important announcement by Father Babbitt—or, rather, two announcements. The first was to the effect that the house in Elton had been rented. The rural mail carrier had brought the news in the forenoon, but Father had reserved it for the evening session. They were all delighted.

“How much rent will they pay?” asked Mother.

“Fifty-five dollars a month,” said Father, “provided we have some papering done and make two or three minor alterations in the house. Mr. Haskins writes that they are first-class tenants, and I think the arrangement is very satisfactory. They will take the house from May 1st. Now for my second announcement. This afternoon I bought Mr. Hovey's horse, cow, and chickens.”

“My! This has been your busy little business day, hasn't it?” said Ethel.

"Old Kit isn't much of a horse," said Father, "but she will do for the present. She is used to farm work, and works well with another horse, though she isn't young and strong enough to work very hard. And she isn't very speedy on the road, but I fancy she will get us to town and back all right when we need her. I paid \$75 for her and \$35 for Mr. Hovey's surrey. Mehitabel, the cow, is a pretty good one, I guess. She is dry now, but she will be giving milk in a month or less. I paid \$55 for her. And I paid \$1 apiece for the twenty-four hens. That, of course, all comes out of the \$500."

"It makes a total of \$189," announced Ethel.

"Phew!" ejaculated Harold.

"I know it seems like a lot," said Father, "but these things are necessities on a farm, and I think we've got a pretty good bargain. Also I hope that we won't need to spend much more for the present. Harold and I made a sort of inventory of the equipment this afternoon, and though many of the implements have seen better days, I think we can make them do this year. By another season we

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shall know just what we need most. Here is a list which we scribbled down. Suppose you copy it off, Ethel."

Ethel did as requested, reading off the items as she wrote them down. The list was as follows:

- One plow.
- One spring-tooth harrow.
- One cultivator.
- One spray pump.
- One farm wagon.
- One hay rack.
- One working harness.
- One driving harness.
- One mowing-machine.
- One corn marker.
- Two hand rakes for hay.
- One garden rake.
- Two pitchforks.
- One manure fork.
- One spading fork.
- One shovel.
- One long-handled spade.
- One old stone boat.
- One scythe.
- Two hoes.

"There are a few other things that we didn't bother to record, but you might add one wheel-

barrow. Other necessities are a wheel or disk harrow and a horse rake for hay. Sometimes a roller is needed also for seeding grass or buckwheat, and a lime spreader. But Mr. Hovey thinks we can borrow those. Mr. Norton has no spring-tooth harrow and no mowing machine, and Mr. Hovey has been lending him ours in exchange for his wheel harrow and horse rake. In the country one has to learn to make the most of neighborly coöperation."

Having thus mapped out their course and taken stock of their possessions, the Babbitts turned their attention to the problem of putting their plans into operation. Harold ordered from a reliable nursery fifty Baldwin apple trees (that being the old reliable variety of their section), twenty McIntosh Reds, twenty Rhode Island Greenings, ten Wagener's (which the State Experiment Station strongly recommended), one Red Astrakhan, one Duchess of Oldenburg, one Wealthy, one Roxbury Russet, one Delicious, and one Esopus Spitzenberg, these last being for experimental purposes chiefly. He also ordered one each of half a dozen varieties of pears, plums, peaches, and cherries for family use.

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"I think you've made a good choice, my boy," said his father. "We know that we can always get a ready market for Baldwins and Greenings, and if you can, in time, build up a direct trade in fancy fruit in boxes, you can add more of the varieties which seem to produce the best results."

The month of April was drawing to a close, and there was much to be done. The land was drying out rapidly and it was high time to start plowing. But Mr. Hovey had not been idle. He might have shirked, under the circumstances, without violating any contract, but he was really sorry to leave Bonnyacres, and he was genuinely interested in what the Babbitts were planning to do. He wanted to see them succeed. So he borrowed Mr. Norton's big gray horse, hitched him up with Kit, and got out the plow.

Plot 10, back of the house, was still too wet to plow, so he began on the small strip along the road in Number 11. He was a fast worker and he started early and worked late. Old Kit had to be rested occasionally, but Mr. Hovey finished the piece in one day.

"An acre a day is enough," he said. "Some claim they can do more than that, but I reckon it's mostly talk."

Then he tackled Number 1, and finished that in a week. The last few days of their stay he plowed Number 10, while Mrs. Hovey, with the help of the Babbitts, got their things packed up for moving.

Harold, meanwhile, was getting very impatient. He had no idea that plowing took so long. He had counted on Mr. Hovey's help in spraying the old apple trees, for Father had discovered evidences of scale and fungus troubles on them and it would soon be too late for the dormant season spraying. Father Babbitt and Harold had ordered some lime and sulphur solution and had cleaned out the dilapidated old spray pump and put it into fair working condition.

Finally, the very last day of April, Mr. Hovey hitched old Kit to the farm wagon, loaded on the pump, and bade Harold come along. The old pump, with its leaky hose, gave a good deal of trouble, but they got over most of the trees, Harold

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working the pump handle and Mr. Hovey leading the horse and directing the spray.

That night Harold was a pretty tired boy.

"I didn't know a day could be so long," he moaned.

"Days on a farm are always long," said Father. "And you must remember that you had the easy part of it. Think how tired Mr. Hovey must be, after plowing for two weeks and then holding that heavy nozzle all day, reaching up to get to the tops of those tall trees. Now you see one reason for growing apple trees with lower heads."

"You mustn't discourage him," said Mother. "He's only a boy, you know, and he isn't used to this sort of work yet."

"That's right," said Father, patting Harold's shoulder. "We'll have you hardened up before this summer's over, and you won't mind it so much."

Next morning Harold's shoulders were lame and sore, but he gritted his teeth and refrained from complaint.

"I'll get hardened up in a month," he assured himself.

CHAPTER V

DURING these busy days Mother Babbitt had been quietly but persistently endeavoring to win her way to the heart of Oliver Goldsmith Brown. If anybody could do this, Mother Babbitt could, but it was a slow and sometimes discouraging process. Bollivar was strangely reticent for a small boy, but gradually he began to realize that Mother Babbitt was trying honestly to befriend him, and slowly his nature responded. With the others he continued to be shy and reserved, but with her, little by little, he became more communicative, telling her about his school and his various activities. He pointed out to her the place in the brook where the trout were most likely to be caught; he took her to the hillside in the old south pasture where the arbutus grew; he showed her some pictures he had drawn of Kit and Mehitable and a bulldog that lived down by the schoolhouse. She discovered in him a genuine appreciation for the beau-

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ties of nature, rather surprising in a boy brought up as he had been, and certain indications of talent, and when she found that he was coming to her with his mild enthusiasms, her heart rejoiced.

Bollivar, in his own repressed fashion, was beginning to look forward to the future with a hope and an interest that he had not previously been conscious of. It would be very pleasant, he thought, to live near this kind, motherly woman who took such an interest in him and his affairs. He was fond of Mr. and Mrs. Hovey, in a way, and he would be sorry to see them go, but he was very glad that he was going to remain at Bonnyacres. In a vague sort of way he was getting a new outlook on life; new visions were taking shape inside his queer little head.

Mother Babbitt was aware of something of all this, and she told Father Babbitt about it.

“I have been watching the boy, too,” said he, “as much as I could, and I agree with you that he has the making of something good in him. Corn and apples and hay and potatoes are not the only things one can raise on a farm; and if we can make

a useful man of Bollivar, and help him to get something out of life, it will be worth the effort. We must find out more about him before the Hoveys leave."

Consequently, he seized an opportunity to question Mr. Hovey.

"No," said the farmer, "I don't believe Bollivar can tell you anything about himself. He was only three or four years old when he lost his mother, and I don't think he can remember much of anything that happened before we took him. We don't know much about him, neither. I asked the state inspector to find out what he could, one time, but he said there wa'n't much in the records.

"All we know is that Bollivar's mother died in Lynn, this state, when he was little more'n a baby. She must've been all-fired poor, an' I don't know what she could of been livin' on. The neighbors didn't know nothin' about her. Somehow or 'nother they got wind of her bein' sick, but it was too late, an' she died. Her clothes an' Bollivar's, they said, was mostly rags, an' she left nothin' of any value except a few dollars. As I understand it, they didn't

find anything to show who she was nor where she'd come from, an' no trace of kith nor kin was ever found. I believe they had some reason to think that Bollivar's father must've deserted 'em, but I don't know. Anyhow, they give up tryin' to find out after a spell, an' the state took Bollivar over."

Father Babbitt reported this conversation to Mother, and they discussed the mystery, for such it appeared to be.

"It has been so long since Bollivar's mother died," said Father, "that I'm afraid it is pretty late now to discover any clue. However, we can try. We don't know how much of an effort was made at the time, and it is barely possible that we may be able to unearth something that escaped the notice of the authorities."

"But how can we go about it?" asked Mother. "It all seems rather hopeless to me."

"I don't know," said Father, "but we'll keep puzzling over it, and perhaps something will turn up to show us the way."

The departure of the Hoveys and the taking over

of the management of the farm and household drove this matter from their minds for a time, though Mother Babbitt continued to wonder, whenever she talked with Bollivar, what sort of people his parents could have been. She discovered in him traits which she thought must have been inherited from people of good breeding and intelligence, but Father Babbitt was inclined to be a little skeptical on this point.

The Hoveys were not ready to leave till the third of May, but Mr. Hovey laughingly said that his job was still waiting for him, and it didn't much matter. When it came to the actual point of leaving, they were neither of them very eager to go, and there were tears in Mrs. Hovey's eyes when she said good-by.

"You've been good friends to us, and treated us square," said she to Mother Babbitt. "I'm afraid we can't hope always to deal with people like the Babbitts."

Harold drove them down to Devon and came back alone behind old Kit. It was rather an adventure for him, for he had never driven a horse

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all alone before. He was quite exultant as he jogged back, sitting comfortably on the front seat. It seemed like his horse now, and his carriage. At last Bonnyacres was theirs and theirs alone. He forgot the hard work of the spraying, and urged old Kit to travel faster; he wanted to get back to his farming.

When he reached home, and, with his father's assistance, had unharnessed the horse and put away the harness and the surrey, he found his mother and sister already in the midst of re-settling the house, and he was called upon to help. He and Father unpacked the household goods, which had been stored in the barn, while Mother and Ethel set things to rights.

It proved to be quite a task, though Mrs. Hovey had left everything as clean as a whistle. The furniture and all the familiar family possessions looked somewhat strange in their new surroundings, and yet it seemed good to be living with them again. It took the better part of two days to get the house in shape, and for Father and Harold to get the swing of the chores and routine work of the place.

Then Father delivered a message to his little congress.

"We've all been working pretty hard," said he, "and we have plenty ahead of us. It seems as though we hadn't a minute to spare. And yet I think we shall make a mistake if we devote all our time to work, with no play. I for one am feeling a bit tired. I haven't got my strength all back yet, you know, and it won't be well for any of us to overdo. I propose a day off. To-morrow is Ethel's seventeenth birthday, as I need not remind you, and I think we might celebrate the occasion with a sort of house-warming."

It required very little persuasion to make the children see the excellence of this idea, and Mother fell into line.

"Let's invite the Nortons over," said she. "We ought to be getting acquainted with our neighbors—better acquainted, I mean."

"A good idea," said Father, "only that will mean more work for you and Ethel. This is to be a holiday."

"I quite agree with you, Father," said Ethel.

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"Working in the kitchen isn't my idea of the way to enjoy a birthday. I say, let's make it a picnic, if this weather holds out, instead of a house-warming. It will be easy for Mother and me to put up a big lunch, and we can start out as soon as the breakfast dishes and the chores are done and make a day of it."

"Hooray!" cried Harold. "Let's take Kit and go to Rapid River. I want to catch a trout."

After supper, accordingly, Father Babbitt walked over to the Nortons'. They were simple farming people, and Father had known John Norton since they were boys together. Mrs. Norton, too, was a native of the neighborhood, and their son, Hugh, now nineteen years old, completed the family circle.

At first the Nortons asserted that they could not think of knocking off work at the beginning of the busy season to go on a picnic, but Father Babbitt's powers of persuasion were unusual, and he thought he saw in Mrs. Norton's tired eyes a sort of hunger for recreation. Hugh, being young and vigorous, was ready for anything, and at last Mr. Norton gave in.

"Well," he said, "I guess Hilda deserves a day off, even if the rest of us don't."

The morning dawned bright and clear, and the Babbitts, including Bollivar, were up betimes, busy with their appointed tasks. The men folks, as Ethel laughingly called them, had finished their chores, Mother Babbitt was putting up the lunch, and Ethel was wiping the last of the dishes, when Hugh Norton arrived. He came breezily into the kitchen with a hearty "Good morning, everybody," and seeing Ethel at work he strode up to her and took the dish towel from her hands.

"Here," he commanded, "you let me finish these. You run and get your things on. Father and Mother are on the way over now."

He meant to be helpful, of course, but somehow his brusque manner displeased the fastidious Ethel. She was accustomed to being treated with a little more deference by young men, and she did not quite understand the somewhat more blunt if no less kindly manners of the country people. A hot flush rose to her face and she was about to make

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some cold reply when her mother, observing the situation, hastened to the rescue.

"He might as well do it, dear," said she. "Come, we'll both be ready in a jiffy."

If Hugh had noticed anything unusual in Ethel's manner he did not show it, but went busily to work, while Ethel, glad to get away for a few moments, left the room.

Presently the sound of buggy wheels announced the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Norton. Father Babbitt and Harold had already hitched Kit to the surrey. The luncheon was stowed away under the seats, everybody piled aboard, and they started off.

It proved to be a jolly picnic. Mr. and Mrs. Norton, thus torn away from their daily cares and labors, were most companionable, and Mr. Norton developed a joking streak which kept the young people in a merry frame of mind all day. They all went fishing, though Mother Babbitt proved to be an unwilling angler. She had to have her hook baited for her, and she was glad she caught no fish. Bollivar and Harold each got a trout and Hugh caught several.

While they were engaged in this pastime, Bollivar's foot slipped on a slippery stone and he fell prone into the water. It was not deep, and Hugh hauled him out quickly by the collar. Mother Babbitt hurried up solicitously to dry the child's tears, but Bollivar was neither hurt nor frightened. Indeed, he was amazingly good-natured over his mishap, and his face lighted up with pleasure when Ethel called him a "little brick." Mr. Norton built a hot fire of sticks and Bollivar partially undressed and hung up his clothes to dry. In a little while he was as comfortable as ever.

It then appeared that Harold had developed an astonishing appetite, and they began preparations for lunch. The trout were broiled on green sticks over the embers of the fire and the lunch baskets were unpacked. Then they all fell to.

"My!" exclaimed Father Babbitt, "I believe that is the best meal I've eaten for over six months." And Mother Babbitt, watching his evident enjoyment of the outing, and realizing that it meant returning health, rejoiced in her heart. No one knew better than she what scrimping and hardship lay

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ahead of them, but to see Father regaining his health and spirits was worth it all.

After the luncheon they all felt like sitting around for awhile. Mr. Norton got out his old corncob pipe and Father Babbitt produced a book.

“We’ve all been reading and thinking and talking so much about farming of late,” said he, “that I thought we deserved a vacation. Here are some dog stories that Uncle John sent me. If you like, I will read two or three of them.”

When he had finished the second story Harold spoke up.

“Say, Father,” he said, “we ought to have a dog at Bonnyacres. We have never had a dog since old fat Cora died.”

“Oh, I wish we could,” chimed in Ethel. “I love dogs!”

“Ought to be able to get a pup cheap around here,” said Mr. Norton. “There’s plenty of ‘em.”

“We’ll see,” said Father. “I think, myself, that a farm isn’t quite complete without a good dog, though dogs don’t haul hay wagons or produce milk, eggs, meat, or wool.”

"We could teach him to go down to the south pasture for Mehitable," said Harold.

"Or at least to meet Henry and bring up the mail," added Ethel.

"We'll see," repeated Father, laughing.

The afternoon passed pleasantly. The grown-ups seemed content to sit in the shade and rest, for it was a warm day, but Harold and Bollivar busied themselves exploring the woods. Bollivar turned out to be not such a bad comrade, after all, and Harold was surprised to discover how much the younger boy knew about the lore of the woods and fields. Ethel was, indeed, the only one who did not fully enjoy herself. Hugh Norton persisted in sticking close to her all the afternoon, and somehow she felt uncomfortable in his company. She did not understand him very well. His manners seemed rough and crude to her, after the boys she had known in Elton, and one could never tell what he was going to say next, or just what he meant.

At last the lengthening shadows told them it was time to be starting home, and they drove back, singing old songs and shouting back and forth between

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the two carriages. The Babbitts and the Nortons had become the best of friends.

“ Which is as it should be,” remarked Mother Babbitt, after they had reached home.

By the time the chores were done they were all a bit tired and ready for a good night’s sleep. But first Father Babbitt said that they must think of the morrow. Mother and Ethel got together a pick-up supper of bread and milk, cake and jam, and they sat down to consume it in comfort.

“ To-morrow,” said Father, “ we must begin work in earnest. I had a talk with Mr. Norton this afternoon, and he helped me to plan out the work a little more definitely. He and Hugh are both willing to help us, and Mr. Norton says we can hire Jabez when we need him.”

“ Who is Jabez?” asked Mother Babbitt.

“ Don’t you know Jabez?” asked Father. “ Well, you soon will. He’s a character, Jabez is. He works for Mr. Norton a good share of the time, and he lives by himself in a little old shack up on the Hillsbury Road. They used to say that he was about half-witted, but I am inclined to think he

knows more about a lot of things than some of those who make fun of him. Anyway, he's a good, steady worker. Help is very scarce around here, and as we can't afford to hire a man for all the time, Jabez may prove to be the solution of our help problem. It is very kind of Mr. Norton to let us have his services at all. Why, what's happened to Bollivar?"

They all turned to look at him. He sat slouched down in his chair with his chin on his breast and a big piece of cake in his hand, fast asleep. Harold and Ethel laughed, he looked so funny.

"I imagine we all feel a little bit that way," said Mother Babbitt. "Off to bed with you—the whole crowd of you."

"Ho hum," said Father, rising and stretching, "I guess you're right, Mother. But hasn't this been a glorious day, though?"

Mother looked up at him with shining eyes. It was so good to see him that way.

"Thank you all for my lovely birthday," said Ethel. "I couldn't have had a nicer one."

"Good-night, grown-up young lady," said Father.

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But out in the kitchen, where they had gone to attend to one or two last things, Ethel said: "Mother, I think it would have been the best birthday I ever had, if it hadn't been for Hugh. Why do I dislike him?"

"I don't know, dear," said Mother. "But perhaps you will get over it. Stranger things have happened. You may be surprised to know that there was a time long ago when I thought I disliked your father."

"Why, mother!" cried Ethel, and then, a strange sort of self-consciousness coming over her, she hurried off to bed.

CHAPTER VI

REAL farming may be said to have begun at Bonnyacres on May 7th, the day after Ethel Babbitt's birthday. At eight o'clock in the morning Mr. Norton and Jabez appeared, having long since finished up their own chores.

"Jabez says he'll work for you to-day," announced Mr. Norton. "I'll stay a little while myself, to see he gets started right, an' then I'll have to get back to my own work. May is no time for loafin'."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Norton remained the greater part of the forenoon, rendering invaluable assistance.

"It's certainly fine to have good neighbors," whispered Mother Babbitt to Ethel.

"First off," said Mr. Norton, "let's have a look at the manure pile. I don't reckon you've got any too much, an' we'll have to figure to put it where it'll do the most good."

Mr. Norton and Harold harnessed old Kit into the farm wagon and Jabez loaded on the steaming manure. He was indeed a unique individual, with watery gray eyes, a loosely hanging jaw, unkempt hair, and ragged clothes. To Ethel, at least, he appeared anything but an attractive object. But he grinned and winked at Bollivar, and that won Mother Babbitt's heart. He spoke hardly a word that first morning, but worked on as steadily as though his muscles never tired. For this, at least, he won Harold's ready admiration.

Plot 10, where the garden was to be, and Plot 11 beside the road were given a fairly good dressing. A little was scattered along the grapevines and on the asparagus bed, and the rest was spread thinly, as far as it would go, on the sandier portions of Plot 1. By noon the job was done, and Jabez went in search of his dinner pail.

"But, Father," protested Harold, "we can't afford to hire Jabez all the time. I've got to learn to do the work."

"All in good time, my boy," said Father Babbitt, "all in good time. We are behind the season

now, and every bit of help we can get is welcome. Jabez did as much this forenoon as you or I could do in a day, and it cost only a dollar. It's worth it, I think. Mr. Norton will need him again soon, and then you'll have your innings."

Harold got his innings a few days later. Jabez hitched the Norton horse and Kit to Mr. Norton's wheel harrow, and went over Plots 1, 6, 10, and 11, breaking up the sod. Then he called to Harold.

"The worst of that's over," said he, "but it ought to be gone over again crossways, to git it in good shape for the smoothin' harrer. Think ye'd like to tackle it?"

Harold was only too eager. They went first to Plot 10, back of the house, which was the most level and free from stones.

"Git aboard, son," commanded Jabez, in his queer nasal drawl, "an' I'll l'arn ye the ph'los'phy o' this here."

Harold climbed joyfully into the seat. At last he was going to do some real farming. If he couldn't plow, harrowing was the next best thing. But by the time he had crossed the field twice, with

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Jabez walking by the horses' heads, some of his confidence had left him. It wasn't as easy as it had looked. The seat was hard and slippery, and trying to guide two horses straight on a plowed field didn't seem quite the same as driving old Kit alone on the road. When he struck a stone or a hummock, it was all he could do to keep his seat, and then the horses would swerve or stop. It was very difficult to think of so many things at once, and it took strength, too. The boy was soon panting and perspiring. Then Jabez took the seat for a little while and Harold watched how he managed it. It seemed to be very easy when Jabez did it. Then Harold tried it again.

"Don't you think it's too hard for him?" asked Mother Babbitt, peering anxiously out of the kitchen window.

Father Babbitt shook his head, smiling.

"No," said he, "it's the best thing in the world for the boy. He's got to learn, and he's got to know what hard work is. It won't hurt him a bit. And see how well Jabez manages the affair. I couldn't do half so well myself; I'd be too easy. I

told you he had more brains than he's generally given credit for."

Jabez was indeed displaying remarkable aptitude as a teacher. He was patient, never spoke roughly, never asked more than the boy could perform; yet he did not err in the other direction; he kept Harold hard at it all that long afternoon. And, for all his uncouth manner of speech, he was somehow able to make his directions and explanations clear. Harold, moreover, never thought of rebelling; he followed the man's directions to the best of his ability.

When five o'clock came and they "knocked off and called it a day," as Jabez expressed it, Harold could hardly stagger into the house for very weariness, but there was a light of pride in his eyes, for he had won Jabez's approval.

"You done purty good, son," said Jabez, "purty durn good for a youngster. Termorrer you'll do better."

In the morning Harold was sleepy, stiff, and sore, but Jabez was inexorable.

"The days are short an' there's lots to be done," said he. "Come on, son."

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To sit on the hard seat of the harrow was torture at first, but Harold bore it like a Spartan, and at length his lameness wore off. Plot 1, which they tackled next, presented even greater difficulties, for the stones were larger and more numerous and the ground very uneven. It was all Harold could do to keep his seat. But he stuck to it, and by noon he felt a certain mastery of the horses and the machine. He began to do the right thing instinctively.

After dinner, Jabez said, "Mr. Norton wants me for a spell. Shall I unhitch the horses, or do you think you can go it alone?"

"I can try," answered Harold.

Jabez turned to go, and Harold started down the long field. He had his troubles, and once he had to call his father to help him adjust the machine, but altogether it was the proudest and happiest day of his life. And it is doubtful whether a boy ever fell asleep more promptly or slept more soundly than Harold Babbitt did that night.

With occasional assistance from Jabez, Harold

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"YE HAVE TO HANG ONTO THE HANDLES AN' RUN IT
LIKE A PLOW"

finished harrowing the four plots, and Mr. Norton's horse was returned to him.

"Now," said Jabez, "I'll show ye about that there spring-tooth cultivator o' yourn. I've got to work for Mr. Norton now, but I guess I can stop long enough to give ye a lesson."

The lighter harrow was intended for one horse, and accordingly Kit was hitched to it.

"Ye can't ride this," said Jabez with a grin, "partly 'cause one horse couldn't drag ye, but mostly 'cause they ain't no seat. Ye have to hang onto the handles an' run it like a plow."

The spring-tooth presented plenty of difficulties. The reins were thrown over Harold's shoulders, and he was obliged to guide the horse and handle the harrow with one pair of hands. It was no easy task, especially when the horse had to be slowed down and the teeth lifted over a stone. And trudging along over the soft ground was most wearisome. But he mastered this machine as he had the other, and when at last the fields lay brown and smooth where he had been, he forgot all about his weariness and vexation.

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On May 12th the fruit trees arrived. It took the whole Babbitt family, including Bollivar, to set out those trees. Harold was to be the fruit-grower of Bonnyacres, and with his father's assistance he directed operations. There were 106 apple trees and they were to be set forty feet apart.

"We have plenty of room," remarked Father Babbitt, "and the time may come when you will be glad you haven't crowded them."

First they dug 106 holes, two feet deep and forty feet apart, Harold, Bollivar, and Father Babbitt taking turns with the spade. The distances from hole to hole were measured with a forty-foot length of rope, stretched from a stake in the center of one hole to a stake where the next was to be. Mother Babbitt and Ethel stood at the end of the rows and sighted down them, to make sure the rows were straight.

Then they opened the crate of young trees—two-year-old stock—and separated them. Kit was hitched to the farm wagon, on which was placed a barrel containing mud and water into which the young trees were thrust, so that the roots would be

moist when planted. Each tree, when it was taken out, underwent a slight pruning of the longer roots, and was then set. Father Babbitt held the tree in the hole, while Mother and Ethel sighted down the rows, directing him to move to right or left, and then Harold threw in the earth and Bollivar stamped it firmly down about the roots. Last of all Harold, under his father's directions, pruned back the little branches.

The first day they finished all the holes and started the planting, but five o'clock came before they knew it, and the rest of the trees were "heeled in" back of the house. They were laid flat, and earth was heaped over the roots to prevent their drying out. The next day the rest of the apple trees were set in Plot 1, and the odd fruit trees back of the house, at the edge of the future garden.

"There!" said Harold, as he surveyed the even rows of leafless sticks with satisfaction, "There's a good job done." He could almost smell the apple blossoms already.

May 15th will always be known at Bonnyacres as the birthday of Beauty. When Harold and his

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father went out to do the chores before breakfast they found her standing on long, wobbly legs, beside her mother, gazing out upon a strange world with big, wondering eyes. She was the most beautiful heifer calf imaginable, reddish like her mother, and with a head like a fawn's. Bollivar was feeding the chickens, but a shout from Harold brought him running, and soon the entire family was assembled to admire the newcomer.

Father Babbitt ran in and telephoned to Mr. Norton, who came right over. He pronounced the calf a "hummer," and gave Mehitable a bran mash for the good of her health. Ethel was enraptured, and promptly named the calf Beauty. Later she became Ethel's special pet, and would follow her about, begging to be scratched behind the ears.

It was quite an event for Bonnyacres. Two days later Mr. Norton helped in the weaning of Beauty, and Mehitable was turned out to the pasture behind the barn, where, in the intervals of calling to her child, she cropped the fresh, green grass with avidity.

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“Now,” said Father Babbitt, “we’ve got something new to learn. We’ve got a calf to bring up.” That night he wrote to Washington, and in due course received a Farmers’ Bulletin on “Feeding and Management of Dairy Calves.” This became their guide from that time on.

In a few days they began using Mehitabel’s milk, and it did seem good after the small amount Mr. Norton had been able to spare them. Eighteen quarts a day Mehitabel gave. That is not a great quantity, but it was ample for them, and it couldn’t have been richer.

For a time Mother Babbitt was overwhelmed by all this milk. She didn’t know what to do with it. There was plenty for cooking, and the whole family began drinking milk, and still there was more than they could use.

“Just wait a few days,” said Father. “As soon as Beauty learns the system, she will take all the skim milk we can give her.”

So Mother sent to town for four milk pans and started a system of skimming. Father said it wouldn’t pay to get a separator for this amount.

Soon she was setting rich, yellow cream before them for breakfast, and on every possible occasion.

“My!” exclaimed Father, smacking his lips. “This alone is worth coming into the country for. Such cream can’t be bought in the city.”

“I skim it twice,” said Mother, “and what’s left is richer than the milk we bought in Elton. As you say, the calf will take all the skim milk, but we aren’t eating all the cream. I suspect I shall have to learn to make butter.”

As for Harold, he took the greatest possible interest in the calf, and little by little he was learning how to milk Mehitable.

Meanwhile the farm work was progressing rapidly. Acting on Mr. Norton’s advice, they bought some early maturing Canada flint corn for seed, and twenty bushels of Green Mountain and Irish Cobbler potatoes.

“Ten bushels to the acre is the rule for potatoes,” said Mr. Norton, “and two acres of that piece is all you’ll want to cultivate, I reckon.”

Mr. Norton and Jabez came over and helped plant the corn and potatoes. Jabez and Harold

cut up the potato seed, with two or three eyes to a piece, while Mr. Norton plowed out long, straight rows on Plot 1, between the newly set apple trees. Then they all helped drop the seed, while Mr. Norton and Jabez put in commercial fertilizer and covered it.

Then they planted the corn, Mr. Norton marking out the rows and Jabez and Harold finishing the job. The corn seed was soaked in tar to discourage the crows and was planted on Plot 11 and on half of Plot 10. The half nearest the house was reserved for Ethel's garden, and Harold went over that once more with the spring-tooth harrow to put it in first-class shape.

All this would have seemed like pretty dull drudgery to most of their Elton friends who had never been farmers, but to the Babbitts, to whom it was still new and strangely fascinating, it seemed like a sort of adventure.

During the evenings they continued their reading, and that would have seemed pretty dull to the uninitiated, too. They had obtained lists of Farmers' Bulletins from Washington, and lists of leaflets

and bulletins from Cornell and other experiment stations, and from these they had selected and obtained a considerable assortment of valuable farming literature. These lists, leaflets, and bulletins can be obtained by anybody, so it will not be necessary to give a complete catalogue of them here. Ethel devoted her attention chiefly to the garden, and her selection included bulletins on vegetable gardening, raising vegetables for canning, and blackberry and raspberry culture. They certainly gave her enough to think about and digest. Harold's favorite bulletins were on fruit growing, while Father Babbitt seemed greatly engrossed in a leaflet on the care of the horse, and in bulletins on raising calves and on poultry management. It amused Mother Babbitt not a little to observe how her family, who formerly had shown a preference for entertaining fiction, were now absorbed in this agricultural reading, the very existence of which had been unknown to any of them except Father Babbitt a year before.

Ethel smoothed off part of the garden plot with the iron rake, and with the help of her father she cleaned up the old asparagus bed.

"I don't know how good this is," remarked Father Babbitt. "It has probably been neglected. But it ought to supply us for this year. Next year, perhaps, we can have some trenches dug and set out some more roots. Then, eventually, we should have some to sell."

"Oh," said Ethel, "that would be fine. I should love to tie up the bunches in some attractive form and try to sell them."

As soon as she could get at it, she planted two long rows of early peas, some lettuce, radishes, onions, and spinach, and followed these with later plantings when the ground warmed up. She also found some old, heavy gloves, and helped her father cut out the dead blackberry and raspberry canes and clean up the berry patch. They had quite a rousing bonfire when that job was done.

These were the more laborious activities of May. Meanwhile Nature had been doing her part. The leaves appeared on the trees about the house and in the wood lot, and, finally, to Harold's great delight, on the little fruit trees they had planted. The shad-bushes at the lower edge of the farm became snowy

white and then faded, and at length the lilacs beside the front door burst into bloom. Every day Bonny-acres became more lovely. The bluebirds had come and then the robins, and at night the whip-poor-wills answered each other in wood lot and swamp, and the hylas set up their cheery chorus in the low land. Ethel's peas appeared in a long green line where she had planted the seed, and at last the apple trees burst into bloom. It was a heavenly sight, but it meant more work for Harold, for as soon as the petals began to fall it was time to spray with lead arsenate to kill the coddling moth that makes apples wormy. Hugh Norton came over, and together they sprayed all the bearing trees on the two farms.

The corn and potatoes started, and Ethel's later vegetables, and the grass grew swiftly in the meadows, for it was a good season, with plenty of rain. But that had a less desirable effect, also. It made the weeds spring up everywhere as if by magic, in potato field, corn field, and garden. Jabez came over again and taught Harold the use of the cultivator, and almost every day during the latter part of May he kept it going.

"A busy cultivator," said Father Babbitt, "means good crops."

Bollivar helped, too, out of school hours and on Saturdays, working close to the corn and potatoes with a hoe. He was especially anxious to assist Ethel in keeping the weeds out of her garden. It was pretty hard work for the little chap, but he was used to it, he said.

"I don't believe there's a lazy bone in that child's body," said Mother Babbitt.

And, finally, the very last day of May, Mr. Norton came over and sowed buckwheat on Plot 6 and on the part of Plot 1 not given up to potatoes, which Harold had prepared for him.

"There!" he said when he had finished. "You won't have to cultivate them pieces any more. The buckwheat'll do your weedin' for you."

Father Babbitt was inclined to view the accomplishments of May with considerable satisfaction.

"It isn't farming on a big scale," he said, "but we've made a good start with what we had, and I hope the results will be encouraging."

But Mother Babbitt derived her chief satisfac-

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tion from something quite different. She saw about her a happy family, industriously contented, their appetites growing every day, and Father Babbitt's health visibly improving.

"After all," she told herself, "that's what we came to Bonnyacres for."

CHAPTER VII

MOTHER BABBITT was the one who had assumed the rôle of Bollivar's chief friend and mentor. She did so not without a serious sense of her responsibility. The task of shaping a young life is no light matter, and Bollivar was of unknown origin and tendencies. Thus far, however, he had given her very little cause for anxiety. He was not a brilliant scholar, but his teacher reported him to be industrious and well-behaved, and he stood reasonably well in his studies. In fact, he took all of his duties a little too seriously for a boy of his age. He never got into mischief or lost his temper, and was seldom sulky.

"I can't say that I wish Bollivar wasn't so good," said Mother Babbitt to her husband, "but somehow it doesn't seem quite natural."

"That's so," said Father Babbitt. "The play spirit somehow doesn't seem to be fully developed in him. This summer, after school is over, we must

see what we can do to bring it out. Meanwhile, I think our best plan is to continue to try to make him feel like one of the family, so that he will get over his reticence."

Gradually Bollivar had been losing a good deal of his shyness. With Harold he never seemed quite natural, but he had taken a great liking to Ethel, and he was devoted to Mother Babbitt. Gratitude seemed to be his ruling emotion. And gradually he came to take a more and more intimate part in the family life. The matter of the poultry helped a good deal.

In June the hens dropped off a little in their laying.

"This will never do," said Father Babbitt, as Bollivar brought in four eggs one noon. "They ought to keep up a hundred per cent. efficiency until the moulting season. Let's have a look at those bulletins."

After consulting the bulletins, Father Babbitt was inclined to change the feed somewhat and to add a bran-and-meal mash, but apparently Bollivar didn't approve of it.

"Mr. Hovey always had good luck with chickens," said Bollivar, "and he never bothered with mashes. He used to say it didn't matter so much what breed they were or what you fed them, as how happy they were. An unhappy hen won't lay, he said."

"Well, how did he make them happy?" asked Father Babbitt. "Did he furnish music for them to lay by?"

Bollivar laughed at that droll idea. "For one thing," he said, "he used to let them run more. Now that the garden is well started, they won't do much damage. They have a good scratching yard, but they get tired of that. Besides, they like to eat grass. If you let them out every afternoon, after they've done laying, they'll be happier."

"What did Mr. Hovey feed them?" asked Father Babbitt.

"Oh, he just gave them a couple of canfuls of mixed scratch feed, night and morning, in the litter, just as we do, only he gave them more meat scraps and bread and vegetables and things. They like a variety."

"I believe, Bollivar," said Father Babbitt, after

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a moment's thought, "that you know more about chickens than any of the rest of us. How would you like to have sole charge of them?"

Bollivar's glowing face expressed his pleasure, and the matter was decided. From that time on the boy spent all his spare time in and about the chicken house. He kept it as clean as a bake-shop, and he saw to it that the nests were well filled, that there was plenty of barn litter on the floor, and that every hen was comfortable. He also managed to dispose of practically all of the garbage from the kitchen, and it was surprising how quickly the hens picked up in their laying. He let them out for a run every afternoon after he returned from school, watched them to see that none strayed away or harmed Ethel's garden, and shut them up safely at night. Toward the end of the month, after school had closed for the season, he began letting them out right after dinner.

"I guess it is true," said Father Babbitt, "that personal care does more for hens than anything else. Bollivar has certainly made good as a poultry manager."

“Yes,” said Mother Babbitt, “and the responsibility is doing Bollivar a world of good. Have you noticed how much more interest he has been taking in all our affairs?”

It was true. Bollivar, gaining confidence through the dignity of his position, became less reticent, readier to take a part in the family discussions. He was an observing boy, and he had picked up quite a little farming lore that was a valuable contribution. He became more communicative when in the presence of the others; his nature seemed to expand. And when school was over, and he was around home all day, this became more marked. Once in a while Mrs. Babbitt even caught the sound of his laughter, especially when queer old Jabez was about, and then her heart rejoiced. Bollivar was fitting in.

The planting had all be done, but that did not mean a period of idleness, by any means. What with the corn and the potatoes and Ethel’s garden, the cultivator demanded Harold’s almost constant attention. As for Ethel, she was nearly overwhelmed. She had planted a large garden, including beans, peas, sweet corn, tomatoes, cauliflower,

squashes, muskmelons, turnips, beets, and a lot of other things, and as they grew, the weeds grew with them. The tomatoes had to be staked and the corn had to be hilled up, and many an afternoon she came in tired, discouraged, and silent, and in no mood to help her mother in the kitchen. She did not complain, and when at length Bollivar's school was over, she found an able and tireless lieutenant in him.

"Bollivar," she said one day, as he finished hoeing the last row of sweet corn, "I haven't admitted it to the rest of the folks, but sometimes I have almost wished I had never seen a garden. I'm afraid I have undertaken too much. I wanted to do some flower gardening, too, and I haven't had time to do much of anything. Do you think I'll ever get through this season with all this?"

"Sure you will. And you'll be glad when we have all these fine things to eat. There never was such a fine garden around here. Everybody says so. Jabez says you ought to have a gold medal."

"Thank you, Bollivar," said she. "That's very encouraging; but I don't know. Anyway, I could

never get along without you. You're a treasure and a great comfort."

"I want to help you, Miss Ethel," said Bollivar, coloring deeply at the compliment. "I like to."

"Now, Bollivar," said Ethel, with pretended severity, "don't call me that. Call me Ethel. I'm your sister, you know."

Bollivar looked up at her quickly, to see if she meant it, but he could not speak. His lip trembled and two great tears formed in his eyes. Ethel wanted to hug him and kiss him, but instead she just put her arm across his shoulders and told him she would count on him. I fancy he liked that better.

Bollivar, indeed, became Ethel's devoted slave, and not a little of his growing happiness was due to their close companionship out there in the garden.

Harold, meanwhile, had become tremendously interested in his corn. It started so well and grew so rapidly that he had rosy hopes for a bumper crop. After securing the necessary information from the State Experiment Station, he enrolled as a member of the Boys' Corn Club of his section and

began poring over reports of corn-club results in different parts of the country. He was determined to have his name appear among the prize winners, and he cultivated assiduously.

Mother Babbitt made good her threat to learn to make butter. She got what information she could from Mrs. Norton, who advised simple methods for their small amount of cream. At first she made it by stirring it in a bowl, but that proved to be a tedious process, especially when the cream was fresh and sweet. Sometimes the butter wouldn't "come" at all. In fact, Mother wasted a good deal of her precious time in this occupation and became rather discouraged.

"What do you think?" asked Ethel one day, as she approached her father and Harold with laughter in her eyes. "Mother has been poking fun at us for reading Government bulletins so much, and now I do believe she's been stung by the bulletin bee herself."

They tiptoed up to the kitchen window and peered in. Sure enough, there sat Mother on a kitchen chair, bending with puckered brow over a familiar-

looking little pamphlet. Harold snickered, and Mother looked up a little sheepishly.

“Well, you see, I had to learn,” she apologized as they came trooping in.

“Let’s see what you have,” said Father Babbitt with a smile, and Mother handed him the pamphlet. It was Farmers’ Bulletin No. 541, on “Farm Butter Making.”

“Is it good?” asked Father.

“Oh, dear,” she replied with a sigh, “I shall never learn all there is in it.”

But she persisted, and she learned a good deal, and eventually she was able to make in a few minutes a pound or so of the most delicious golden butter.

“Mehitabel’s cream is so rich in color,” she explained, “that I don’t have to use a mite of coloring matter. In the winter, when she is off the pasture, I suppose I shall have to.”

Most of the churns recommended and advertised were little wooden, barrel-shaped affairs, but it seemed to Mother that they would be hard to keep clean and fresh. At last she found in a mail-order

catalogue, and finally purchased, a patent churn that was just a big glass jar, with a paddle in it that worked like the dasher in an ice-cream freez. This suited her perfectly, and before long she found butter making no work at all—or, at least, so she said—and it certainly made a difference in the grocer's bill.

"The only trouble with this milk and cream and butter business," she said, "is that it takes up all the room in the pantry, and I'm always knocking the screens off the pans."

"Some day," promised Father, "we'll rig up a dairy for you, down cellar or somewhere, and then you'll be in clover. And if Beauty turns out to be as good a producer as her mother, you may be selling print butter at a profit."

There were other matters connected with the household arrangements that demanded attention as the warm weather came on. There was no easy way for them to get ice, but Father was inventive. In the first place, he built a ventilated, screened cabinet, in which the food could be kept that did not spoil easily. For the butter and other things he

had a galvanized-iron box made in town, with a cover, and a hanging shelf inside. The drinking water for the house was piped down by gravity from a never-failing spring in the hillside, and flowed into a good-sized tank or reservoir, with an overflow pipe, beside the kitchen sink. This water was always cold, and when Father's iron box was placed in it, there was still room enough to get at the water, and the contents of the box were kept quite cool and fresh.

There was another source of water supply, which was used for the bathroom and for dish washing. This had been installed several years before, in order to give the bathroom facilities that city visitors demand. They were all very thankful now that it had been done, for it had been rather expensive at the time. Water was pumped up from the brook into a pneumatic pressure tank in the cellar, and a hot-water boiler and the usual plumbing completed the system. There was a small gasoline engine beside the tank in the cellar, but the tenants had usually been able to get this out of order, and preferred to use an auxiliary hand pump, when they bothered

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with the thing at all. One of the first things Father had done upon their arrival at Bonnyacres was to overhaul the engine, and he now had it in fairly good working order. Half an hour's pumping each day served to supply the system. The sewage was carried away to a cesspool, with some of the features of a septic tank, which had been dug and built of concrete on the slope north of the barn sheds. Water supply and sanitary arrangements are among the most necessary and most generally neglected features of the old-fashioned farmhouse, and the system at Bonnyacres, with all its crudities, was by far the best in the neighborhood.

Another thing that the versatile father did was to make a fireless cooker for Mother. He obtained the plan and specifications from the Office of Home Economics of the Department of Agriculture, and it proved to be most satisfactory. He made it out of an old trunk, which he patched up, stuffing newspapers and mineral wool around three galvanized-iron pails as insulating material, and properly sealed it up. He had to buy the soapstone disks, but the whole thing cost much less than the kind you buy. Right

after breakfast Mother could prepare the vegetables or pot roast and put them in the cooker, and never give them another thought until it was time to take them out for dinner. As she burned wood in the range, a method of cooking to which she was unaccustomed, she found the fireless cooker a great help.

Finally, Father and Harold built rat traps—several kinds, including tip-up affairs designed to let the rats drop to their death in a barrel of water. But none of these traps entirely solved the difficulty, for the house seemed to be overrun with rats. The mice it was easy enough to catch in small traps, but the rats were too wise. In the evening they could hear them scampering around overhead, and they drove Mother and Ethel almost frantic. Father said that wherever there were barns and grain there were bound to be rats, but he waged war against them with vigor. He sent to Washington for help, and received a copy of *Farmers' Bulletin No. 369*, on "How to Destroy Rats." By following the directions in this pamphlet and by keeping the traps baited, the nuisance was gradually reduced, and the family could spend the evening in the

sitting-room without being constantly disturbed by the racing and scrambling and squeaking of noisy rodents overhead. A poison containing phosphorus and barium carbonate was mixed with meat or fish and placed in the garret. As this usually disappeared in a day or two, it was assumed that it must have been effective.

But, best of all was Horatius. He was a big black cat that made his home in the barn, and for a long time he was unapproachable. By means of warm milk and persistent coaxing, however, Ethel succeeded at last in making friends with him, so that he would come running up to her for a caress. Finally she was able to entice him into the house, and though he remained half wild and refused to become domestic, scorning laps and cushions, he was a welcome addition to the family. He would lie for hours in the garret, sometimes capturing a rat or a mouse, and eventually frightening the rest of them away.

Though these were busy days at Bonnyacres, it must not be supposed that the Babbitts lived an isolated existence. They were quiet people, but socia-

bly inclined, and, unlike some city people, they did not turn up their noses at the speech and manners of their rural neighbors. There was a little white Methodist church on the hill to the south of Bonnyacres, about a mile away, and they made a practice of attending service and Sunday-school. The minister was a tired-looking man of middle age who had apparently become resigned to a partial failure in life. His wife was a semi-invalid, and they had no children. He was a poor preacher, which, no doubt, accounted for his lack of success in his career; but he was a good man, friendly and pleasant, something of a scholar in his way, and the Babbitts liked him.

“ You can’t expect a great preacher in a little country church that can afford to pay its pastor only \$600 a year.” That is the way Father put it. “ But the church and the school are the two instruments working for good in this community, and I think we ought to support Mr. Skinner in every way we can.”

The minister appreciated this, and he became a more and more frequent visitor at Bonnyacres.

At the church, too, they made the acquaintance

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of other families of the neighborhood, many of them people with marked peculiarities, but for the most part good-hearted, and many of them possessing a wholesome philosophy of life. Even the fastidious Ethel came gradually to esteem the country people more highly and to look beneath their rustic manners for the good that lay there.

Then there was Miss Robbins, Harold's school teacher. She, like the Babbitts, was a comparative newcomer, young, educated, and refined, with a genuine sense of her responsibilities. It was no easy place that she had to fill, for there were plenty of unruly children in the school, and there were times when she was discouraged. But in the Babbitts she found sympathetic and congenial friends, and she was a frequent and welcome visitor at their supper table. And as the days passed, Ethel and Sylvia Robbins formed a friendship that was destined to endure.

These people, with the Nortons, formed the Babbitts' little circle. They soon came to understand that when one lives in the real farming country one is dependent on one's neighbors. They may be prone

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to gossip and they may show too much curiosity and a tendency to thrust themselves forward, but in the last analysis they are much like other people, and when help is needed they are always to be depended upon.

CHAPTER VIII

IN July came the problem of getting in the hay, one of the big jobs on the farm. It had been a good spring for hay, with plenty of rain, and there seemed to be a pretty good crop waiting to be cut, all things considered. Kit had become pretty tired of the dry remains of last year's hay, and she, at least, thought it was high time to begin. So Father and Harold stepped over and consulted Mr. Norton.

"I thought you'd want to talk about that pretty soon," said he. "Mr. Hovey and I used to join forces and hay the two farms together, and I reckon we can do the same way, if you're willin'."

Father Babbitt replied that he would be only too glad to make such an arrangement.

"You see," continued Mr. Norton, "you've got a good mowin'-machine, and I've got a horse rake. We need two horses, and your Kit works pretty good alongside my Bill. We each have a good wagon and hay rack. Jabez and Hugh will both

take hold, and with you folks to do the light work—rakin' after and all—I guess we can make a pretty good job of it, in spite of the scarcity of help. Why, they're offerin' \$5 a day for mowers, and they're hard to get at that."

"When should we begin?" asked Father.

"My old rule is to begin hayin' on July 5th, if the weather's good and it don't come at the end of the week. Your four-acre lot is ripe now, I see, and we might as well begin on that and keep right at the two farms till it's all in, doin' the low, wet pieces last."

Thus it was agreed. The Babbitts didn't do much celebrating on the Fourth that year—work was too pressing. But they flung the Stars and Stripes to the breeze over the front porch, and Harold and Bollivar arose early and fired off their crackers. Mother and Ethel made orange sherbet and sponge cake, and in the evening they invited the Nortons over to enjoy refreshments and red fire on the front lawn.

The next day proved to be good haying weather, as Mr. Norton had predicted—warm and clear, with

a fresh breeze tempering the heat of the sun. Quite a little regiment of haymakers assembled in the four-acre lot. There was Father Babbitt, Ethel, Harold, and Bollivar, Mr. Norton, Hugh, and Jabez. There was little for most of them to do at first, but Jabez soon had the mowing-machine clattering, and by noon the first of it was dry enough to rake into windrows. Hugh took a hand at the mowing-machine while Jabez instructed Harold in the use of the horse rake. Mr. Babbitt and Ethel followed after with hand rakes, raking the stray wisps into the windrows.

There are more efficient and scientific methods of haying practised elsewhere, no doubt, but Mr. Norton followed the time-honored system of his locality, and it served every purpose. The next day was equally warm and bright and it was not necessary to spread the hay; it had cured sufficiently in the windrows, Mr. Norton said. Jabez took the mowing-machine over to the Norton place to mow a small piece back of the house, while Hugh and Harold got out the hay rake again. As soon as the horses could be spared they finished raking the last of the four-

acre lot. The others, meanwhile, under Mr. Norton's instruction, "tumbled" the windrows of the day before into cocks. Before noon they were ready to get in the first load. The horses were hitched to the wagon, with the hay rack on it. Mr. Norton climbed aboard, for it takes experience to load hay properly, while Hugh and Jabez pitched. Father Babbitt and Harold began "tumbling" the newer windrows, while Bollivar and Ethel followed after the men, raking up the "scatterin's," as Mr. Norton called them, and tossing them on to the load with their rakes. When the load was ready they drove into the barn and took turns pitching off the hay and stowing it away properly in the mows.

This process was continued, with some interruptions, until all the hay on both farms was safely stored in the barns. It took the better part of three weeks. It was hard work and exhausting, especially on the hottest days, but the men were used to it, and only the lighter work fell to the lot of the Babbitts, and a good deal of the time their help was not needed. Father protested that they weren't doing their share, but Mr. Norton allowed him to pay

for half of Jabez's time, and insisted that that squared it.

But, light as the work was for some of them, they felt the strain of it, for sometimes there was a great need of haste, and sometimes their work had to be done over twice. In the wet spots, and when there was rain, the windrows had to be spread out and the hay thoroughly dried before it could be cocked and loaded. One afternoon a black thunderhead appeared in the west, and there was a grand rush to get the hay under cover. All hands took hold, and the storm broke just as the last load went rumbling into the barn. The men rested a while, watching the lightning, before they pitched that load off, while Ethel scampered into the house, wondering whether the barn would be struck by lightning and all that fine hay burned up.

Mother Babbitt's only part in all this was to take refreshments out to the workers in the field, but it was a strenuous time for all of them, and their hands were blistered and sore from the use of the rakes. Besides, the chores had to be done just the same, and when their help was not needed in the hay field Ethel

and Bollivar found plenty to do in the garden, for the young vegetables were coming on; while Harold was obliged to run the cultivator whenever he could get the use of a horse.

But it was all over at last, and the great mows of hay in the barn did look good. It was then that Mother Babbitt proposed a rest and another picnic. Even Jabez was invited this time, but he would not go, insisting that he had important business to attend to, though Father Babbitt suspected that his important business was probably a good long snooze in his shack.

This picnic was much like the former one, except that they went to a different place. This time there was no fishing and no falling into the water, for they climbed Mt. Seward. Again Hugh did his best to win his way into Ethel's good graces, but without much success. She tried to be gracious toward him, but there was something about him that seemed to repel her. Toward the end of the day he became quite silent, and his face wore a woe-begone expression which made Mother Babbitt smile, though she couldn't help being sorry for him. If the truth were

known, Mother Babbitt liked Hugh and was sorry that Ethel found his company so uncongenial.

It was on this picnic that Mother Babbitt was discovered to possess not a little nature lore. In her efforts to reach Bollivar's heart she had revived many half-forgotten things about the birds and trees and wild flowers, for though she had not been a farm-bred girl, she had always loved the country and in her younger days had made something of a study of the live and growing things of the fields and woods. Bollivar had a natural aptitude for this sort of thing and had observed many things for himself. They had watched the robins nesting in the old pear tree back of the house, and knew the day when the young fledglings had first taken flight. They knew where the oriole had her nest in the orchard back of the barn, and they watched the rose-breasted grosbeaks that came around the barn sometimes. The two had gone on little botanizing expeditions, and now Bollivar began asking questions about certain trees and ferns and shrubs on the mountainside. Much to the surprise of everyone else, Mother Babbitt produced two little handbooks, and the latter

part of the afternoon was spent in a nature-study lesson which they all enjoyed.

“Why, Mother,” said Father Babbitt, “I didn’t know you were so wise in all these matters. You’re a regular little Thoreau or John Burroughs. Where did you learn it all?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know very much,” said she. “I seem to have forgotten many of the most important things. But I shall brush up on it, and I hope we shall all find it interesting.”

“Oh, I know we shall,” said Ethel.

“It would seem to be a waste of opportunity,” continued Mother, “if we were to live in the country and not learn something about nature. There are so many fascinating things to be learned and observed. There are the birds and the moths and butterflies, and the wild flowers, and all the different kinds of trees—oh, the material is endless.”

“All right, Mother,” said Harold, “I’ll be one to learn, if you’ll be the teacher.”

“And don’t forget the mice and chipmunks and all the other animals, and the quails, and everything. I want to know more about them,” said Bollivar.

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So the picnic resulted in an awakened enthusiasm for nature study, besides being a day of good fun in itself.

Fun, indeed, the Babbitts all had, though you would hardly think so from my description of the amount of work they had to do. But it was not all work and no play, for the Babbitts were fun-loving people and knew how to mix play with work. Even Bollivar found that out, and it was good to see the way he began to join in with the merry-making.

It was on the Sunday morning after the picnic that Beauty got loose. The family were getting ready for church, and the delay would have made some people irritable and cross, but not so the Babbitts. They forgot all about their hurry for the time being, and though they were late to church, they arrived with pleasant, if somewhat heated, faces. When they explained it to Mr. Skinner, after the service, he laughed and forgave them.

No one knows just how it happened, but some one must have left the gate of the paddock unfastened. Ethel was the one who found it out. She had trained some morning glories up the south side of

the barn, and she thought she would take a look at them while the rest were getting ready for church. What was her surprise to find Beauty out there, nibbling at them.

Beauty was quite a big calf now, and growing bigger and handsomer every day. She had learned to use her legs, and she could run and jump like a deer, as Ethel soon discovered. She approached Beauty, but the calf kicked up her heels and dashed off down the lot.

"Oh, Father!" called Ethel. "Harold! Bollivar! Come help me catch Beauty. She's loose."

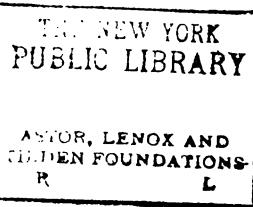
The whole family, dressed for church, came out of the house pell-mell, and Harold and Bollivar at once gave chase. But they hadn't the slightest chance with Beauty's long, active legs, and Father called them back.

"That will never do," said he. "You'll only chase her off the farm. You'll never catch her that way. We must use strategy. Let's see if we can surround her."

He sent the boys on a wide detour down to the lower end of the field, beyond where Beauty stood

watching them, wondering what the next move in this delightful game would be, while Father and Mother and Ethel deployed across the lot. As soon as they had arranged their forces they began to draw in closer to the runaway, but whenever one of them approached her she darted off between them, and the tactics had to be begun all over again.

In the end no one of them caught her. It was old black Horatius to whom that honor was due. He lay sunning himself beside a boulder in the middle of the field, perhaps watching lazily for field mice, when Beauty, in one of her wild dashes, came suddenly upon him. He had not allowed the antics of the humans to disturb him a particle, but here was a menace of a different sort. Horatius sprang to his feet, his back arched, and his tail as big as a muff. Beauty, confronted by this ferocious-looking, spitting little creature, stopped in her tracks and regarded him dubiously. But nothing seemed to happen, and so Beauty took a tentative step forward. Horatius stood his ground, bristling and swearing in his feline way, and Beauty lowered her head and shook it at him. She did not appear to





FATHER MANAGED TO CONTROL HIMSELF ENOUGH TO
STEAL UP BEHIND BEAUTY WITH A ROPE

be frightened by so small a creature, and yet she hardly dared to approach too close. She began circling around the cat, making little half-hearted lunges at him, while he pivoted about, facing her.

It struck all the Babbitts as being inexpressibly funny. The boys rolled on the stubble grass and laughed till the tears came to their eyes, quite forgetting to be careful of their Sunday clothes. Mother, too, had to sit on the stone wall, she became so weak with laughter. But Father managed to control himself enough to steal up behind Beauty with a rope. Suddenly, while her attention was engaged by Horatius, he threw a noose over her head and she was caught.

But their troubles were not over yet. Beauty was not used to a rope, and she was strong and stubborn. She refused to budge. The more Father pulled the more she struggled, while the others shouted anew with laughter at the sight. At length, Father, afraid that Beauty might hurt herself, was obliged to desist, and stood panting and wiping his streaming forehead, wondering what to do next.

Then Ethel came up.

"Let me try," she suggested.

Now Ethel had made a great pet of Beauty, and the calf knew her. She patted Beauty's neck, smoothed her velvet nose, and scratched her behind the ears, until she became calmer. Then she began coaxing her with soft words, until at last Beauty went along with her to the barn, as docile as a little dog.

"Mary had a little lamb," sang Harold, and the rest applauded the joint exploit of Ethel and Horatius. As for the cat, as soon as the danger was over he scurried across the field and under the barn, and was seen no more that day.

"And I don't believe," said Mother Babbitt to Father on their way up the hill to church, "that Bollivar has ever had such a good laugh in all his life."

Bollivar, indeed, was becoming more and more like a member of the Babbitt family. He had lost a good deal of his shyness and reserve when with them, and he was quite evidently becoming a happier, more normal boy. They had all become very fond of him, in spite of his queer ways, and they

began to realize that the thing he chiefly needed was a realization of his place in the world. For in many ways he was old for his years, and they knew that serious thoughts often went on inside his tousled head.

The thing that was troubling him came out one day, not while he was in the kitchen with Mother Babbitt, where he most often opened his heart, but out on the road where he and Father Babbitt were going on an errand together. He had great respect for Father, and it gave him a certain confidence to learn that he could talk with him as man to man.

"You see," Bollivar was saying, "you are somebody. You are Mr. Babbitt, the owner of Bonnyacres. Harold is somebody; he is your boy. But I am not anybody. I don't belong to anybody. I'm not a Babbitt, and Brown doesn't mean anything. When I grow up I shall be all alone. I haven't any family or anybody, except you. I wish I were somebody."

It was a roundabout way to put it, but Father Babbitt understood.

"I suppose," said he, "it would help if you could find out who your father was."

"Oh, yes," said Bollivar. "Then I would know that I had belonged to somebody once, even if my father were dead. I would know where I had come from and I would feel more as if I were somebody."

"I see," said Father Babbitt.

There was a long silence in which they both did a good deal of thinking. Then Father said:

"It is very difficult to know how to go about it. We have made some inquiries, and there doesn't seem to be any clue. However, I will make another attempt. We must keep trying, anyway. I have an idea that may lead to something. We will see. Anyway, I will promise you to do all I can."

Bollivar was much cheered by this promise, and Father was as good as his word. That evening he excused himself from the family circle, shut himself up in the little room that had become known as "Father's study," and wrote a long letter to his brother. Uncle John was a Boston lawyer, and a smart one, and it had occurred to Father that if

any one could get at the bottom of the Bollivar mystery, Uncle John could. He set the whole matter clearly before him and begged his assistance.

"There won't be any fee in this for you, John," he wrote, "for the boy is poorer than we are, and that's saying a good deal. But you will be doing a great service to a deserving lad, and if you are successful, the result may give you lasting satisfaction."

Father knew Uncle John's kind heart, or he would never have bothered the busy lawyer with this problem. And Uncle John's interest was awakened at once. A week later he replied that he had already started an investigation, and that, though he had as yet no reason to offer any encouragement, he would do what he could, and would report as soon as he had learned anything of value.

"If John only could find out something, it would be a wonderful thing for Bollivar," said Mother Babbitt.

"It would, indeed," said Father.

CHAPTER IX

IT was never very hot at Bonnyacres. True, there were warm, sunny days in July when the roads were glaring and dusty and the heat waves rose from the barn roof, but in the evening came cooling breezes from the hills and a clearness in the air that was a delight in itself.

The Babbitts were busy enough during these July days, but the feverish rush of planting and spraying and haying were over and they were able to raise their eyes to the hills now and then and to realize how beautiful the world was. There had been times when each one of them had doubted whether, with all the care and burden of work that sometimes seemed overwhelming, they would ever really be entirely happy and contented at Bonnyacres. Somehow or other, however, they had gradually become adjusted to the new conditions, and things had managed to straighten themselves out. Now they began to feel at last that Bonnyacres was, indeed home. The old house and barn, the orchards

and meadows and cultivated fields, had all become somehow dearer as they had become more familiar, and with the slackening of the work there came a certain peace and a realization of the restfulness of the country.

It was in late July that Father and Harold undertook the thinning of the apples.

“There is just so much vitality in a tree,” said Father, “and if some of it is used up in maturing crowded or misshapen fruit, there will be less for the rest.”

So they went over all the bearing trees, Father on a ladder and Harold climbing about among the branches, much to his mother’s dismay. They estimated that they picked off a full third of the fruit, which they gathered up and gave to Mr. Norton for his pigs, after old Kit, who was an inveterate apple eater, had had her share.

Bollivar’s chickens continued to lay remarkably well, and he sold enough surplus eggs to the grocer to pay for all the feed that had to be bought. He watched them carefully, breaking up the broody ones by shutting them up in a place by themselves where

they had no nests to set on, and he managed to keep up an eighteen-egg average from the twenty-four hens.

"If I had fifty hens," said Bollivar, "I would be getting three dozen a day, and at thirty cents a dozen or more I could make a lot of money."

"If you can get good hens next year," said Father, "you might increase your flock a little, but my experience has been that people often make a mistake when they begin to multiply with poultry. You must remember that a large part of your success is due to individual care and to the variety of food furnished by table scraps, etc. This same care and food, distributed among a hundred hens, would not produce the same results. I would advise increasing a little each year until you learn exactly the maximum number that you can handle profitably. Perhaps next winter we can get an incubator and raise our own pullets, only I must warn you that the process of bringing pullets to maturity, at the present price of feed, is an expensive one. I am inclined to think that for a farm like ours, where poultry is a side issue, it is cheaper to let some one

else do the hatching and brooding and rearing, and buy year-old laying hens in the spring at \$1.00 to \$1.50 apiece. However, we can discuss all that later. I don't want to discourage you, and you have done splendidly so far."

Ethel's garden was not wholly a success. The beets did not do well, and some of the beans grew up mostly to vines, but on the whole she had every reason to congratulate herself, for the family were enjoying fresh vegetables every day now, and occasionally there were some to sell in Devon. With the accumulated proceeds she purchased a wheel-hoe, and this, with the horse cultivating that Harold was able to do for her occasionally, lightened her work materially. The weeds would get ahead of her sometimes, and in one place the persistent quack-grass drove her to despair, but for all that she had the cleanest, best-looking garden in the neighborhood.

Ethel also took charge of the berry patch, and in July she and Bollivar put on canvas gloves and went all over the vines again, thinning out unproductive canes and cutting back the long new canes so as to

make them branch and produce more bearing surface for next year. For several weeks blackberries and raspberries with cream formed a dessert which the Babbitts never grew weary of, and Mother and Ethel put up quarts of them for winter use.

On Sunday afternoons a walk was the order of the day, and it was on these occasions that Mother took the lead as a teacher of natural history. She knew how to make it interesting, largely because of her own enthusiasm, and what the children learned of the natural life about them added not a little to their enjoyment of existence at Bonnyacres.

It was in July, too, that Scout became a member of the Babbitt family. Back on the Hillsbury Road lived a man named Terwilliger, with his old mother. He was an illiterate sort of fellow, whose father had nearly worked him to death when he was a boy, and who had never been farther from home than Holyoke, and there only once. Going to town was a great task to him, while to Harold it was a pleasure. Harold drove old Kit in about once a week, to do the family errands, sometimes alone, and sometimes with one of the others. Mr. Terwilliger

found him very obliging, and though he never appeared very gracious or grateful about it, Harold only smiled and continued to do his errands. But that was only because Mr. Terwilliger had never learned how to say "thank you." He was a silent man, but not as morose as he seemed, and he had one enthusiasm. That was dogs.

One day Harold drove up to Mr. Terwilliger's with a sack of bran, and the man offered to show him some new-born puppies. Harold was surprised to find over half a dozen dogs about the place, and Mr. Terwilliger, once his tongue was loosened, talked volubly and with knowledge regarding their pedigrees, training, and accomplishments. Harold, who had always loved dogs, proved to be an eager listener.

"Dogs," said Mr. Terwilliger, "is the beatin'est things goin'. I've had dogs all my life, an' thar ain't a man among these hills that knows more about 'em than I do, ef I do say it myself. But the longer I live, the more I see thar is to know about dogs. Thar ain't been nobody able to tell me yit how they know what they know. They can see an'

smell an' hear better than a man, but that ain't all. They can sense things some other way that we don't know nothin' about.

"Take this Airedale, Pete. I got him when he was two years old. I'd had him a week, and he hadn't been offen the place. Then—a Tuesday night it was—he strayed off. I hunted all around for him but couldn't git no trace at all. No one had seen him for miles around. He was a valu'ble dog an' I couldn't afford to lose him, but I had to give it up. On Saturday mornin' he was lyin' on the doorstep. His feet was worn sore an' he was all in, but he got back by himself."

"Where had he been?" asked Harold.

"For a long time I didn't know. I s'posed he'd strayed off after a rabbit or somethin' an' got lost. Even so, I thought it was pretty smart of him to find his way back. But long afterward I picked up enough facts to make me believe he'd been stolen. I never had no proof of it, but I'm sure enough myself that he was picked up by a man in a team that night an' sold to a party in Lymanville. That's twenty-four miles away. That dog knew he didn't

belong to them people, an' he broke loose first chance he got an' come straight home. Now how did he know all that, an' how did he find his way? I ask ye."

"It was instinct, I suppose," ventured Harold.

"Hm," grunted Mr. Terwilliger. "An' can ye tell me what's instinct? I wish I had more of it, 'cause it's right good stuff, whatever it is. Say, the more I know about dogs, the more respect I got for 'em. Sorry I can't say as much for some humans."

The dogs flocked around him, their tails wagging and their eyes speaking devotion. Harold could not help envying him this canine friendship.

"A good dog," continued Mr. Terwilliger, "is the best friend a man can have. They can't cheat ye, an' they forgive everything. Only they're so short-lived. That's the cussedness of it. No sooner do you git fond of 'em than they up an' die. That's why I have so many, so that the one that goes won't be missed so much. But I hadn't oughter keep so many. I can't afford it. That's why I'm goin' to give one to you."

"Give one to me?" cried Harold, his eyes sparkling.

"Sure," said the man. "You've done me many a favor that I ain't never paid for. This is the best way I can pay. That's all right; don't say nothin'. This young setter's yours. He's four-fifths pure Llewellyn, an' a mighty knowin' dog. The only thing about him is that he had distemper when he was a puppy, an' it spoiled his nose. I don't claim he'll ever be a first-class bird dog, but I cal'late you don't care for that. Otherwise he's a fine dog, with lots of brain an' heart, an' a good setter is the knowin'est, lovin'est thing God ever made. His name's Scout. Take him an' give him a good home, an' we'll call it quits."

Harold was too wildly delighted with the gift to protest, and in a surprisingly short time the two came romping in to Bonnyacres.

All the Babbitts liked dogs, and it was not long before Scout had won his way into their hearts and had become one of the family. One night he strayed away and returned to Mr. Terwilliger's

house, but after that nothing could have driven him from Bonnyacres.

Scout was a young dog who had not yet outgrown his youthful playfulness, and occasionally he got into mischief. He seemed to delight in tormenting Beauty, but she soon got used to him and learned that his bark was the only terrifying thing about him. Mother was at first somewhat dismayed by his antics, but she was soon making as much of him as the others. When they all were away, she bade him stay with her, and though he eagerly desired to go, he obeyed, and the farmhouse never seemed lonely with Scout about.

The most exciting time in late July was a furious battle with the potato bugs. They seemed to come all at once. At first Father discovered a few old hard-shelled fellows, that he said were laying eggs, and he predicted trouble.

“Preparedness is the order of the day,” said he, and he sent for some lead arsenate with Bordeaux mixture in combination. The former was to poison the bugs, and the latter to help prevent possible blight.

The orange-colored eggs were laid on the under sides of the leaves though Father and Harold crushed all the bugs they could find, and soon the little, soft, red-brown bugs appeared in clusters. Then came a warm, gentle rain, and the rapidly growing bugs seemed to swarm over the vines as if by magic. Father had purchased four squirt-guns, for he believed that the more primitive method would be more effective than attempting to use the barrel sprayer. Ethel and Bollivar were drafted into service, and the four of them went up and down the long rows, spraying the vines with the poison solution. The bugs toppled off and died, but there always seemed to be others to take their places. No sooner had they finished the patch than they began all over again. Three times they repeated the process before they could claim victory. And how those bugs could eat! A small colony of them seemed able to destroy half a plant over night.

What made it harder was the fact that the warm rain seemed to have brought to life a horde of mosquitoes also, the only ones that had bothered them all summer. You have to use two hands for

this kind of spraying, and when you're working in the hot sun, and a big mosquito sees fit to drill a hole in your forehead or the back of your neck, it's no fun.

When the ordeal was at last over, there were a few patches where the bugs had had their way with the potatoes, but when they learned that the pest was unusually troublesome that year, and that some of their less vigilant neighbors had lost nearly their whole crop, the Babbitts took heart and congratulated themselves.

July drifted softly into August, with a continuance of the farm and garden work. A drought made things look a little less flourishing, particularly Harold's corn, which was on rather light soil. But he kept the cultivator going almost constantly, and that helped a lot.

"There will always be dry spells in this climate to contend against, at some time during the season," said Father Babbitt. "We do not irrigate here, and the only cure is thorough cultivation. That loosens the upper layer of earth, making a dust mulch, as they say, so that the moisture cannot work up

through and evaporate. There is a good deal of moisture still in the soil, and the problem is to keep it there."

Ethel found the same thing to be true in her garden, and she was doubly glad that she had bought the wheel-hoe.

In September the potatoes were dug. Approximately two acres had been planted on Plot 1, and Harold had hoped for 200 bushels to the acre, in spite of his father's warning.

"One hundred bushels is a good crop for this section," he had said, "and I have seldom seen this land yield over eighty."

Jabez and Hugh came over to help. Jabez plowed up the rows, Hugh followed with a spading fork, and Harold and Bollivar, who had shorter backs to bend, picked up the tubers. It was hard work, and their backs ached when they went to bed that night, but that was not the worst of it. When the potatoes were at last measured and safely stored in bins in the cellar, the total tally was seventy-six bushels. Harold couldn't understand it, though his father did his best to explain that it was the fault of the

soil and the season. It was several days before Harold would be comforted. He had counted on realizing such big results from his crop, that it seemed to him almost a total failure.

Some consolation was derived from the fact that it had been a poor potato season throughout Massachusetts, and new potatoes were selling for \$1.40 a bushel.

"We shall need perhaps ten bushels for our own use from now till next September, and we ought to keep twenty bushels for seed, to be augmented by some new seed next spring. That will give you forty-six bushels to sell. That's something, my boy, and the first real income we have made out of the farm. So cheer up."

Harold did cheer up after a while. They decided to hold the potatoes for the present, in the hope of higher prices later on.

One other business operation remains to be recorded for that month. Father had been anxious to get a better horse, for old Kit was showing the effects of the steady work, and he felt that she would not be valuable for many more years. By rare good

luck he found a purchaser. A family in Devon wanted a steady driving horse, and Kit was just what they needed. With the proceeds, and \$75 additional, Father was able to purchase a strong young horse named George.

George turned out to be a treasure. He was lively, and Mother Babbitt was a little afraid of him. But he proved to have not a vicious trait in him. He was only playful. When Father or Harold went into the stall to harness or curry him, he would turn his head about, put back his ears, and nip their coat sleeves. But he never really bit, and never kicked or acted willful. His playful ways soon made him a great favorite, and with Ethel he was as gentle as a lamb. When one of them came near the barn he would stamp and paw and whinny until he was bribed with an apple to be quiet.

Old Kit had never liked Scout. The dog seemed to make her nervous. But George and Scout struck up a close friendship in a short time, and neither seemed to be quite so happy as when the other was about. Scout would recognize George's footsteps and the sound of the carriage wheels returning

from town long before any one else could hear them, and would dash off down the road to meet his friends. They would come up to the house together, Scout dancing about the horse and George arching his neck and shaking his handsome head. It was as pretty a picture as one would ask to see.

Altogether, the animals at Bonnyacres added immeasurably to the pleasure of farm life. The dog, the horse, the cow, the calf, and even the chickens had all become individually so familiar to them that the Babbitts could hardly imagine what Bonnyacres would be like without them.

"Dear old Mehitabel and pretty Beauty!" said Ethel. "I had no idea I liked animals so much. The girls back in Elton would be amused to see me with them, I know. They don't realize what they miss. I think I could never be quite happy again without animals of some sort."

"We haven't any motor cars or servants or fine clothes," said Mother, "but sometimes, when I look at all these live things that know and love and trust us, I feel positively wealthy."

"Amen!" said Father.

CHAPTER X

A GOOD deal of sentimental rubbish has been written about "the little old red schoolhouse on the hill." Doubtless tender recollections center round it in the minds of many men and women, but as an educational institution it must be admitted that it has its serious limitations. In many parts of the country they are doing away with the small district school as rapidly as possible, substituting various forms of more efficient consolidated township and county schools.

In Massachusetts, however, where many educational movements have had their beginnings, the small rural school still persists in many places. Its faults are inherent, for the small towns cannot afford to pay for first-class teachers and one teacher cannot be expected to handle several grades effectively. So much of her attention is required for matters of discipline that the scholarship standards are likely to be below those of city schools.

Knowing these things, and desiring that Bollivar should have every possible advantage of education, Father Babbitt made an investigation of the little school on the hill to the south of Bonnyacres, with the idea that he might find it desirable to arrange to have the boy taken in to Devon every day with Ethel and Harold. To his pleased surprise he found this school to be an exception to the rule. The boys had taken hold during the summer and had cleaned up the premises. Improved ventilation, seating, and sanitary arrangements had been installed, and new equipment of various sorts provided. Parents reported that their children seemed to be doing well in their studies and that evil influences were less than had been the case for many years.

Father Babbitt was interested, and he went to see Mr. Skinner.

"It is all due to Sylvia Robbins," said the minister. "That girl is a wonder. If every teacher were as wide awake to her responsibilities and opportunities as Miss Robbins is, it would be a fine thing for this nation. I hate to say it, but I believe

her school is a greater influence for good in this community than my church is."

"How did it happen?" asked Father Babbitt.

"Pure luck," replied Mr. Skinner. "We were fortunate to get a teacher with a vision. She has been offered a larger salary to go elsewhere, but she believes she can do more good here. She has been very quiet about it all, but the town fathers have at last come to appreciate her and now they give her almost anything she asks for. She has improved the school a hundred per cent. in every way, and so long as she stays you may be sure it is a good enough place for Bollivar. Some day I am going to write a report on what she has done, for the guidance of ambitious rural teachers elsewhere."

Ethel Babbitt was naturally much pleased when she learned of the high esteem in which her friend was held in the community.

"It makes me feel ashamed of myself," said she, "for I have been doing nothing at all for the public good."

"I'm afraid we have all been living a good deal to ourselves," said Father Babbitt, "but one needs

to become established first before one can exercise much influence. Later on we must study the question of what we can do for our community, for when educated people move into the country they have a duty that must not be shirked."

Needless to say, it was decided to let Bollivar continue to attend the local school, and he was much delighted by the decision. As for Ethel and Harold, they started in September to attend the Devon High School, Harold entering as a freshman and Ethel as a senior. Sometimes, when George was not working at the farm, they drove in, putting the horse up in the barn of a family near the school, and sometimes Father drove them in or went for them. But very often they walked the two miles, and after the ground had become familiar and the way did not seem so long, they began to enjoy it.

At first the new school seemed strange to them, but after a while they began to make friends, and before the winter was over they had formed many pleasant associations in Devon. For after all, however much one loves farm life and the country, human society is necessary, and there were refined,

cultured people in Devon that were worth knowing. Through the children, Father and Mother Babbitt also became acquainted in the village and their occasional excursions to town during the winter relieved the sense of loneliness and isolation which they, as city people, might otherwise have felt.

With Harold and Ethel in school a good part of the time, Father had to call on Jabez and Hugh frequently for help, but the children worked with a will Saturdays and late afternoons, and they managed to keep abreast of the fall work. Ethel continued to supply the table with fresh vegetables. Her late-sown peas were now bearing, and turnips, onions, and winter squash were stored away for later use.

With the opening of the hunting season, men with guns were frequently to be seen on the roads and in the woods and fields. Hugh Norton was a born sportsman and a fine shot, and it was hard to get him to do any work when the hunting was good. He often made as much as \$10 a day going out with parties from the city, and one day he presented the Babbitts with a brace of fine, plump partridges.

These were tremendously enjoyed, but both Mother and Ethel possessed a sentimental horror of shooting, and the knowledge that these birds had been shot in the nearby woods detracted somewhat from their pleasure.

"But," protested Father Babbitt, "we need meat food, you know, and it isn't any worse to kill birds under the law than to slaughter sheep and steers."

"I know," said Ethel, "but that isn't why they do it. They go gunning because they love to kill, and I think it is a cruel and degrading sport."

Consequently, when Hugh Norton asked permission to borrow Scout, to see whether he would flush birds or run rabbits, Ethel protested so vigorously that the permission was refused. Unwilling to let the matter drop there, she took occasion to lecture Hugh in no uncertain terms, for she felt a real conviction on the subject. It was an unwise thing to do, for it was really no concern of hers, so long as Scout was not used, and Hugh scuffled off looking quite black and sullen.

In a day or two her conscience began to trouble her. She was naturally of a frank, just, and gen-

erous nature, and it occurred to her that she had wronged the young man. So the next time she met him she apologized. Hugh did not take it very gracefully, and Ethel left him with a hot flush of mortification on her cheek.

“Why is it, Mother,” she asked, “that I have such trouble getting along with Hugh? He is our neighbor and I would like to be friendly with him, but I can’t. He seems to want to be either sullen or—or fresh.”

Mrs. Babbitt smiled.

“You don’t understand Hugh yet, my dear,” said she. “When you know him better I think you will see that he has good intentions and a kind, honest nature. He’s a capable fellow, too, and only needs a little polishing to make him a gentleman. Perhaps he was never apologized to before and didn’t know just how to take it. I have no doubt that he is fully as uncomfortable at this minute as you are.”

“But,” said Ethel, “we’ve known him quite a while now. I should think I would understand him if I’m ever going to.”

“Keep trying to be nice to him,” counseled her

mother, "and it will come out all right, I'm sure."

If Bonnyacres had been beautiful in spring and summer, it was doubly so when October came. Nowhere in the world is the autumn foliage more beautiful than in the Massachusetts hills. First the soft maples showed scarlet branches and then turned to flame. The hard maples became red, the birches golden, the oaks deep crimson, the sumacs wine color, until all about Bonnyacres the woods were gorgeous. On October 10th the coloring was at its height. They remembered the date, for it was Harold's birthday, and as it came on Sunday, they took a long drive up over the hills. Even the browns seemed rich and glowing. Then gradually the colors began to fade and the leaves to fall. This was the season, too, of splendid sunsets.

October was a busy month. In the first place, the corn had to be cut and shocked, the husking being done whenever they had spare time. Early frosts had necessitated an early harvesting, and some of the corn had not fully matured. On the whole, the corn was more successful than the potatoes, but the

crop fell far below Harold's expectations. Boys in the valley won the Corn Club prizes that year.

"Never mind," said his father. "We'll have this shelled, and there will be plenty for George and the chickens all winter, and we may have some left over to sell. It will cut down the feed bill tremendously. And next year you will do better. We'll try to get seed of an earlier maturing variety, for our seasons are always short in the hills, and each year that you fertilize and cultivate and turn under green crops will show an improvement in the soil and an increased yield."

The apple crop was very good, considering the fact that very little had been done to the old trees. There were, all told, about forty barrels of Baldwins and thirty of Greenings, besides a few fall varieties which they did not try to market. Jabez was called on to do most of the picking, but the Babbitts did the sorting.

They made three grades, as nearly as possible to conform with the apple grading laws of the state—A grade, B grade, and culls. About twenty barrels of the last grade went to the cider mill at ten cents

a hundred pounds. Harold wanted to try boxing some of the finer fruit, and selling it direct to the consumer, express paid, but Father persuaded him that it was too late to work up the trade or get the boxes, and so he was obliged to postpone the venture until another year.

Three barrels of Baldwins and two of Greenings were stored in the cellar for family use and the rest were offered for sale. Apples, it appeared, were plenty in Devon, and the price was very low. Mother, however, had an idea. She wrote a letter to a man named Collins in Elton, who had a truck garden outside of the city and from whom she had formerly purchased fruit and vegetables. He was part farmer and part huckster, and she knew he sold fruit that he did not himself raise. He replied that his trade required chiefly Greenings for cooking, and he offered \$3 a barrel for good, sound fruit, not fancy, and ordered fifteen barrels of Greenings and five of Baldwins.

Then there was a grand rush for barrels. Most of those in the neighborhood and in Devon had been bought up, but by including some salt barrels from

the creamery, and by picking up a few here and a few there they managed to get together enough.

"Next year," said Father Babbitt, "we will profit by experience, and will gather our barrels during the summer when they are cheap and plenty."

Mr. Norton had a barrel header, and he helped them head up the barrels—a troublesome job until you get the hang of it. Mr. Collins's order was shipped by freight from Devon, and in due course a check came for \$60, which looked pretty good to the Babbitts.

"It may be," said Father Babbitt, "that apples will prove to be our best paying crop. It is largely a matter of marketing, however, and we must work up some businesslike methods before the young trees come into bearing. The average farmer knows how to grow better than how to market, and with our city connections, we should have an advantage. If we can avoid selling in bulk to middlemen, we shall realize more from our products. We shall never have large quantities of anything to dispose of, and with a little thought we ought to be able to make Bonnyacres largely a direct-to-the-consumer farm.

There is where we, with our nearby cities, have the advantage over the big Western producers."

The order to Mr. Collins used up all the B grade Greenings, with some of the A grade thrown in to make up the measure, and it made quite a hole in the B grade Baldwins. The rest of it wasn't so easy, but with this encouragement, they persisted, sending letters to many acquaintances in Elton and elsewhere, and receiving every now and then an order for a barrel of fruit. By New Year's day they had only four or five barrels left, and they disposed of these in Devon, where the price had increased somewhat. The net income from apples, after deducting the direct expenses, was \$116.50.

"And it wasn't half as much work as the corn and the potatoes," said Harold. "I'm for the apple business. I'm glad I planted those trees last spring, and I'm going to plant more."

Meanwhile, work had been going on in preparation for the next year. After the potatoes and corn had been harvested, Plots I and II were thoroughly harrowed and rye was planted on them.

"Rye seed is expensive," said Father Babbitt,

" but it's the cheapest kind of fertilizer after all, and our experience of this year goes to show that our land needs something. I am inclined to think that it is all of it deficient in humus. Stable manure will supply some, but we have a limited amount of it. Rye planted now will live all winter and come up strong and green in the spring, and when turned under it will add a lot of humus as well as conserve the plant food already in the soil."

The idea appealed to Ethel, and she got Jabez to sow rye also on such portions of her garden plot as were now free.

The lower portion of Plot 4, that had been plowed the previous fall and had been allowed to lie fallow all summer, was plowed again, harrowed, and sown to rye. On this piece, too, Father Babbitt spread some lime that he had been able to get.

On Plot 6 the buckwheat was turned under in September and rye was sown.

" Now," said Father Babbitt, when these things had been accomplished, " I want to undertake the renovation of some of our hay land—all of it, eventually. As I have before said, I believe hay to be

one of the most valuable crops we can raise on this farm. Part of Plot 4 has already been started, and gradually, piece by piece, I want to work over and re-seed all our meadow land. During the summer, as you know, I had Jabez clear the brush off Plot 8, pull up some of the worst of the stumps, and clean the piece up generally. I believe it will make good hay land if properly fitted, and I propose beginning this fall. The scheme I have in mind has worked well elsewhere, and I think we should try it.

“ The program, in general, is as follows: Select a small piece each year to be refitted. This year it shall be Plot 8; next year another acre of Plot 4, perhaps. Plow it in the fall and dig a ditch for drainage if the land is low and wet. Plow and harrow in the spring, after the old sod has rotted somewhat and before the weeds have started, and sow buckwheat. Turn under the buckwheat in the fall, manure or lime the piece, and sow rye. The next spring turn under the rye and plant a hoed crop—potatoes or corn—with commercial fertilizer. Potatoes are better, for they can be harvested earlier than corn, and the grass seed can be sown that fall

instead of the next spring, with the hope of a good hay crop the following season, especially if the piece is top-dressed with more commercial fertilizer. For our needs, I would use three parts timothy, one part red top, and one part clover, and sow heavily—a bushel to the acre."

It seemed to be an interesting program, and bulletins on the hay crop bore out Father's theory.

"You can get hay," said Father, "by merely plowing, harrowing, and re-seeding, and that is the common practice about here, but the better you fit your land the better hay you will get, and the longer it will hold out."

Consequently, Plot 8 was plowed in late October and the ditch was dug by Jabez. That was the last bit of real farm work for the season.

Cold weather set in early, the thermometer going down to zero on November 15th. Two of the chickens caught cold and one of them died. Bolivar became alarmed for fear roup would carry off his flock, but he and Father doctored them up and made the hen house warm and comfortable for the

winter. They built frames to fit into the front of the house, and stretched muslin on them.

“That will protect the hens against wet and cold winds, without depriving them of fresh air. It’s a makeshift, but it will serve. Some day we’ll have a fine new poultry house built on the most approved plan.”

The cold weather, too, warned them that they must prepare for their own housing. The farmhouse was old and many cracks and crevices let in the wintry wind. Father and Harold closed these up as well as they could, and put weather strips on all the doors and windows. Five tons of coal were hauled out from Devon for the winter supply of the kitchen range, for Mother had found wood too dirty and troublesome. For the heating stoves and fireplace they bought four cords of wood from a neighbor and had Jabez cut and split a portion of it. With one big fireplace and two good heating stoves, they felt that they could defy Jack Frost.

“Of course, the bedrooms will be cold,” said Father, “but we can get a couple of oil heaters to

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take the chill off. Perhaps next year we'll be rich enough to have a furnace put in. But people have lived here for several generations without one, and I guess we can weather a winter or two."

CHAPTER XI

NOVEMBER was clean-up month at Bonny-acres, and there seemed to be an infinite number of small jobs to be attended to. The stock and poultry were made comfortable for the winter. The potatoes were re-sorted and, with the apples, were carefully protected with hay for winter storage. The underpinning of the house was banked up in the old-fashioned way, with hemlock boughs laid along by way of decoration. Ethel and Bollivar cleaned up the garden, burning the dried tops. Manure was spread on the portions of the garden that had not been sown to rye, and Harold harrowed it in. The corn was sent to the mill to be shelled, and some of it to be cracked or ground into meal. By the time zero weather came, the Babbitts were in pretty good shape.

Incidentally, Ethel and Bollivar got after the berry patch again, cutting out all the old canes and burning them. A mulch of manure was spread on

the old asparagus and rhubarb beds. Finally, Harold and his father went up on the hill at the rear of Plot 10 and pruned the old grapevines there. They had borne very little fruit in October, and had evidently been neglected for several years. The vines were a mass of useless canes, and some of the supporting wires were down. Father instructed Harold in the somewhat difficult art of pruning grapes.

"Grapes," said he, "bear fruit on the new wood of the last season's growth, but we shall have to cut out some of it, I fear. We will start a two-cane system, as it is called, and though it may result in a small yield next fall, it should produce results the year after if we keep it up."

They cut out and burned an immense amount of rubbish, repaired the supports, and tied up the remaining canes.

"They look like lifeless stumps now," said Father Babbitt, "but they'll start out fine and strong in the spring."

A few days before Thanksgiving Jabez came to announce that he was going to Maine for the winter to engage in lumbering, and before he went they

had him cut up the rest of their winter's supply of wood. Then came the first real snowstorm of the winter, and they began to feel that the shut-in season was upon them in earnest.

Around the blazing fire one evening they held a long family council and checked up their six months of farming. They reviewed the various farm activities they had engaged in and laid their plans more completely for the next year's work.

In some respects it had not been so bad. Ethel's garden had been fairly successful, the chickens had done well, the horse, cow, and calf appeared to be thriving, and the apple crop had paid. On the credit side of the account, too, they were able to record a good deal learned about growing corn and potatoes, marketing fruit, the care of stock and poultry, gardening, and raising hay. Considering the fact that they were quite green at it all when they started, this was indeed a good deal to congratulate themselves on.

But the financial outlook was rather discouraging. Their income was very small and their nest egg had melted away. It looked as though it would

be a long time before the farm would begin to pay, and as though they must scrimp pretty close to get through the winter. As they discussed this phase of their problem their faces were all rather sober. One never likes to contemplate a failure, and they could not face the future without anxiety. Would they be able to make a go of Bonnyacres after all?

“What can we do about it?” asked Mother Babbitt, with a worried look on her face.

“I have sold the potatoes,” said Father. “They had shrunk some, but I got \$60 for forty bushels. I should like to have held them longer, but we needed the money.”

There was a weary note in his voice that they did not like to hear. They all knew that it was hardest for Father, who had always supported his family in comfort if not in luxury. They sat for some time in silence, gazing into the fire. It was Bollivar who spoke first.

“Perhaps,” said he, “I could get a job doing chores or something. I have learned to milk, you know. I couldn’t earn much, but it might help.”

Somehow that broke the spell. Ethel leaned over impulsively and kissed the lad, much to his embarrassment.

“Bless your heart,” said she, “you will do nothing of the kind. If anybody goes to work, it shall be I. I’m the oldest, and I’m nearly through school. Do you think I ought to, Father?”

Father drew a long breath.

“Let’s try more rigid economy first,” said he. “I know we haven’t been extravagant. Far from it. But saving is easier than earning, and we shan’t have much else to do this winter. Let’s all take hold and see if we can’t make what we have carry us through.”

“I’ll do my part,” said Mother Babbitt, simply.

“As you always do,” said Father, patting her hand affectionately.

“I have been thinking,” he said, after a pause, “that we might accomplish something by a more careful system of accounting. Most farmers don’t keep accounts, and never know where the leaks are. Men in business are much more particular. Ethel, will you be our auditor?”

"I'll be glad to, if it will help," said she.

That was how it came about that Ethel opened a set of books, and never again at Bonnyacres was money earned or expended that was not carefully recorded. Budgets were made out in advance, and if they did not work out as planned, an investigation followed. The result was that no dollar was spent unless there was a dollar provided for to spend, and the Babbitts never again felt quite the same acute worry as they did that first November.

By Thanksgiving Day their spirits had already risen, and they had a real Thanksgiving celebration, with a feast at noon including turkey and all the "fixings."

"We've got to scrimp all winter," said Father Babbitt, when he brought home the turkey, "but we'll begin with a genuine Thanksgiving dinner, anyway."

The jollity of the occasion had its effect, and that evening, as they gathered again about the family hearth, there was less pessimism in their conversation. They found themselves facing the prospect

more bravely. Ethel's new bookkeeping system was under way and promised to accomplish something in the matter of keeping a check on expenditures and stopping the leaks. They had a roof over their heads; that was the first point in the inventory. They had a good cow and chickens, and the promise of plenty of eggs, milk, butter, and cream. There was an abundance of hay in the barn to carry them through. The winter's fuel was on hand. There were potatoes and apples, winter squash, turnips, and other vegetables in the cellar. Surely, they might have been a good deal worse off.

"You see," said Father, "it isn't easy for a New England farmer to make much money, unless he has a good deal of capital to start with and can go in for fancy stock or something of that sort. He has to be content with a poor man's living. But a poor man's living he can certainly get if he is industrious. He is independent. Business disaster can do him little harm. He cannot lose his position. Even illness will not cut off entirely his source of supply. He may be deprived of the luxuries of life, but he cannot well starve.

"And there's another year coming," he continued. "We have made mistakes, but we can profit by our failures. We can credit ourselves with considerable valuable experience, and next year we will see if we can't organize our business a little more efficiently. At least, we know better what we may expect, and where our labor will produce the best results."

"It seems to me," said Mother Babbitt, "that the beauty of farming lies in the fact that there's always another year coming. In other lines the effort is continuous, and if the trend is down hill it is very discouraging. But with farming one is obliged to cease operations when winter comes, and can start in with fresh courage and renewed hopes in the spring."

She did not add what was nearest her heart, that after all, whatever their failures might have been, they had at least saved Father's life. He was still with them, and growing stronger all the time. In that they had gloriously succeeded, and that was, after all, their main object in coming to Bonnyacres. They all felt this, and

they also felt that country life had other compensations.

"I think," said Ethel, in the course of their conversation, "that most of our friends would pity us in a way—some of the old Elton friends, I mean. They would think we were oppressed by poverty, and that life here on the farm, with so few of the conveniences and advantages of the city, must be dreary and doleful. For my part, I should feel cramped if I had to live in a city again. And all the things we have to be thankful for here are too numerous to mention, even if some of our friends wouldn't be able to appreciate them and wouldn't believe that they are amply sufficient for us."

"The thing I am most thankful for," said Father, "is that you all feel that way. It would be dreadful if any one of us felt that farming was only irksome drudgery and country life dreary. I hope you will not tire of it. You will have need of all your stoutness of heart during the long, cold winter, when nothing is growing and discomforts are many."

It was indeed during the winter that the real

test came. They could not help feeling the sharp contrast between the warmth and conveniences of the comfortable city house in Elton and the lack of them in the old farmhouse at Bonnyacres. Day after day the thermometer would not rise above zero on the porch. It was bitter cold dressing in the morning, and building the fires became a dreaded task. Some days it seemed impossible to keep warm in the house.

But there was another side to the picture. In the first place, they had running water, hot and cold, which most of the farmhouses in the neighborhood lacked. That one thing is enough to make life tolerable. Without it, these city people must certainly have been unhappy. The wood fires were troublesome, but they soon learned to reduce the care of them to a system, and Bollivar and Harold kept the wood boxes well filled.

And they would have been singularly lacking in the love of the out-of-doors if the winter landscape had not impressed them with its beauty. After the snow had come to stay, and all the hills were white and glistening with it, a new world opened before

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SOMETIMES FATHER READ ALOUD

them. They bought a second-hand cutter, and many a fine sleigh-ride they enjoyed. And there was something wonderfully invigorating in the crisp, dry winter air. In the middle of a sunny day, even with the thermometer hovering about the zero mark, there was a grateful warmth in the sunshine that made one hate to go inside. And always the woods, sheltered from the winds, seemed comfortable and inviting. In spite of all the hardships and discomforts, the Babbitts became winter lovers, and when they were all out in the open, with Scout romping in the snow, there seemed to be something in the air that encouraged vivacity and laughter.

And there were the long, cosy evenings indoors about the open fire when the winter winds howled outside and the flames roared up the chimney. Never had the Babbitts seemed to come so close together as a family. Uncle John would have said that they had become more "familyfied" than ever. Sometimes they talked, sometimes Father read aloud, and Father always knew how to choose good books and how to read them. Sometimes the children studied their lessons or played games, while

Father read to himself and Mother sewed and dozed in her chair.

Sometimes the Nortons or Mr. Skinner or Sylvia Robbins came in, and then there would be corn popping and candy making. Both Hugh Norton and Miss Robbins had good voices, and Ethel would get out her guitar and they would sing the old favorites over and over. Those were jolly evenings at Bonnyacres.

But it was not all play. Aside from their regular lessons, Ethel and Harold continued their agricultural and horticultural studies. Bees and turkeys were Harold's chief interest now.

"Harold," his father would say with a smile, "you'll be wanting to raise English violets or ostriches next. But I suppose the enthusiasm of youth is not to be curbed."

"Anyway," retorted Harold, "bees are important in an orchard, and some day I shall have some, and sell honey."

They did not stay at home every evening, either. The socials in the little church on the hill, which were held almost every week, were an attraction.

Ethel, to be sure, found the rural young people a little crude and rough in their merrymaking, but it gave them all a chance to become better acquainted with their neighbors, and the neighbors seemed to appreciate it because the Babbitts did not feel too proud and citified to join in with the rustic sociability. Nothing is so quickly resented by the country people as snobbishness. To offset this, in a way, there were occasional excursions in to Devon, where they had an opportunity to mingle with people of a little different stamp.

"They are no better than our hill people," said the loyal Mother, "but it is good for us to go where we are obliged to remember our manners."

Finally, there was the Community House. This was another of the achievements of Sylvia Robbins. There was an old, disused little one-room schoolhouse up on the Hillsbury Road that was an elephant on the town's hands. It was of no use as a schoolhouse, and a gang of tough boys and young men had broken into it and had made it a sort of headquarters. It was said that gambling and drink-

ing were not unknown there. At Sylvia's suggestion, and largely through her efforts, the leaders in the community took it over and furnished it simply, as a house of sociability. Chairs and a stove, tables and other furnishings were installed, and a kitchen addition was built on and equipped with a range and dishes. A committee, of which Miss Robbins was an active member, had the Community House in charge and raised the small maintenance fund by means of subscriptions. Here the men held their Saturday night card tournaments. Here the local band practised. Here, occasionally, lectures were given by experts from the State Agricultural College and others, and suppers and plays were given for various causes. Without interfering with the activities of the church, it served as a social center for the community, and Mr. Skinner was broad-minded enough to lend it his support. When it was learned that Mr. Babbitt was an accomplished reader, his services were drafted, and he gave a series of Kipling Evenings that were greatly enjoyed and appreciated.

At most of these affairs, Hugh Norton danced

attendance on both Ethel and Sylvia, and the country people began to notice it and comment upon it. This fact distressed Ethel greatly, for she was honestly trying to be nice to Hugh. Sylvia, however, only laughed.

“ We must have a swain, my dear,” said she, “ and Hugh is a good fellow. So long as there are two of us we are safe.”

But Ethel did not feel so secure. Several little things had led her to believe that she was the favored one of the two, and this, instead of flattering her, caused her trouble. She was too sincere to be willing to flirt with Hugh, and yet she could discover no way out of the difficulty without being unkind to him, or, on her own part, assuming too much.

So she let the matter drift along until one night when they were walking home in the moonlight from the Community House. Hugh had been, in an awkward, diffident sort of way, a little sentimental, and Ethel had consequently acted, perhaps, a little cold toward him. Hugh was sensitive enough to feel this.

"May be," he said, "you'd rather I wouldn't be going with you."

Ethel winced a little at the expression. For a young man to be "going with" a girl meant, in the country phraseology, serious intentions. Not knowing just what to say, she kept silent.

"I never said anything about it," said Hugh, in an apologetic tone, "so I didn't know."

They trudged along in silence, but Hugh's air was so disconsolate and his whole manner so dejected that she began to feel a sort of amused pity for him.

But at the door he cast off his dejection and lifted his head. In his eyes Ethel read a sort of pride that she could not help respecting.

"If you'd rather not go up to the church with me Thursday night," said he, "I won't come for you."

There was something so frank and honest and manly in the way he said it that she felt a strange sympathy for him.

"Oh, yes," she said, impulsively, "you must come for me. I want you to."

Hugh strode home that night a happy youth, but

Ethel tossed on her pillow for an hour before she could go to sleep, wondering what she had done and why she had been so weak as to relent at the crucial moment, and wondering, above all, why it should make any difference to her.

CHAPTER XII

THE first Christmas at Bonnyacres! The Babbitts will never forget it. It was a real New England Christmas. There had been a thaw about the middle of December, but more snow had come, followed by dry cold, and the countryside, as Harold expressed it, looked like a Christmas card.

Never had the Babbitts had so little to spend for Christmas gifts and celebration, but there was something for everybody and a plenitude of Christmas cheer. They had become adjusted to the winter conditions, and their period of depression had passed. What did it matter if there was but little to spend if the Christmas spirit were present?

And it was. Father had recovered all his old boyish spirits, and no Santa Claus could have been jollier. All the Babbitts caught the contagion of it, and for days before there had been mysterious whisperings in the hallways and holiday excitement and suspense reigned as of yore.

Ethel was largely responsible for the plans.

"I suppose I'm getting pretty old for this sort of thing," said she, "but there's no one to make fun of me. I have to be a young lady so much of the time that I want to be a little girl again once a year at least."

"And we all love to have you," said her mother, kissing the top of her head as she used to do when Ethel was a wee tot.

In the first place there was the Christmas tree, a young hemlock cut from their own wood lot and hauled in by George with much shouting and laughter. It was set up in the little parlor and decorated with candles and strings of popcorn and various ornaments, some of them carefully saved from previous years. An old apple tree stump was rolled in as a yule log and strings of ground pine and bunches of green laurel were placed over all the pictures in lieu of holly and mistletoe.

Sylvia Robbins had gone home for her vacation, but Mr. and Mrs. Skinner and all the Nortons came in for the Christmas Eve celebration. The candles were lighted, Ethel got out her guitar, and they all

sang ancient Christmas carols, while the yule log on the hearth sent out a grateful glow.

After the company had gone, Father got out an old, dog-eared book and read "*'Twas the Night Before Christmas*," just as he had done every Christmas Eve since Ethel could remember. There were tears in Mother's eyes when he had finished; she was thinking what a sad Christmas Eve it would have been if there had been no Father to read the old, familiar verses. Then they all hung up their stockings from the mantel, and trooped off to bed, the parents almost as excited as the children.

No one knows when Santa Claus came in the night, and there is some suspicion that it was not Santa at all, but Father and Ethel who stole out and filled the stockings. At any rate, they were all bulging in the morning, not with valuables, but with apples and candy and little five-cent gifts, and historic old Babbitt keepsakes that were put in for jokes. Father received the old rusty penknife that found its way into his stocking every year, and there were packages of court plaster, sample cans of tal-

cum powder, lead pencils, and all sorts of more or less useful odds and ends to make merry over.

Then came breakfast, with raisins in the raised biscuit in accordance with a long-established Babbitt custom. And after breakfast the Treasure Chest. This was another historic Babbitt institution. An old trunk had been placed under the Christmas tree the day before, and into it each of the Babbitts had put his or her gifts for the other members of the family.

Harold was chosen to officiate as Chief Digger of the Treasure, and from the mysterious chest he extracted the gifts. A list of them would be too long to print, for they were many if not costly. There was even a collar for Scout and a big piece of rock salt for Mehitabel. No creature on the farm was forgotten.

And all of the Babbitts had contributed, even Bollivar. He had entered into the spirit of the day —his first real Christmas celebration—shyly at first and then enthusiastically. And to each of the Babbitts he had given some small token of his affection, purchased out of his meager savings. But when

Ethel opened her package marked "To Ethel, with love, from Bollivar," the tears sprang to her eyes. For it was no makeshift of a gift, but a sterling silver coffee spoon, marked with her name.

"Oh, Bollivar," she cried, "you shouldn't have given me this. You shouldn't have spent so much. I explained that all the presents were to be inexpensive ones, and you must have robbed your bank to get this."

"Well," said Bollivar, stammering, "I wanted to. I wanted to do something finer, but this was the best I could get."

"Thank you, Bollivar," was all Ethel could say, but he understood. They were all so touched, indeed, that it was some little time before Harold could coax back the laughter again. Ethel never did know just how to show her appreciation to her small admirer, but she never forgot the look of happiness that came into his eyes when he saw that she really appreciated his generous gift.

While dinner was preparing, Mother ordered the men folks out of the kitchen, and Harold had an idea.

"Father," said he, "let's take a walk for an appetite, you and Bollivar and I. Let's go up to see Mr. Terwilliger and his old mother. I don't believe they have much of a Christmas, do you?"

"Good idea," said Father, and went to the closet for his overcoat.

"Here," said Ethel, as they were leaving, "take this along," and she handed Harold a quart jar of preserved plums and a small glass of wild grape jelly that she had made.

When they reached the Terwilliger place the dogs greeted them with loud barking, for Scout went along to visit his old comrades. Mr. Terwilliger admitted them in his customary silent manner.

It did look bare and lonesome inside. Mr. Terwilliger had evidently been reading a farm paper and his mother was pottering about in the kitchen. There was nothing about the place to suggest Christmas cheer. But the Babbitts had brought Christmas with them, and it wasn't long before they had Mr. Terwilliger talking about his dogs. Then Mrs. Terwilliger came in and sat down in an old Boston rocker. After listening to the others for

a while, she began to join in the conversation, until at length they were listening to her. She told them of Christmases long ago, and tales of the neighborhood when she was young. They found her to be a very intelligent and lovable old lady, with an excellent memory, and they wondered why they had not made her acquaintance before. She was much pleased with Ethel's preserves, and in return she gave them a box of candied flag-root, and promised to make them later some maple and salt-water taffy, for the manufacture of which she had once been celebrated.

“Merry Christmas!” they cried, amid the barking of the dogs, as they turned off down the hill.

“Merry Christmas!” called Mr. Terwilliger, as though the words were a little strange to him.

“And God bless you!” added his mother, wiping her eyes.

“Harold,” said Father Babbitt, on the way home, “if you were a Boy Scout you would deserve several merit marks for that good deed. We must go to see Mrs. Terwilliger again and take Mother and Ethel. Very often the best opportunities for doing

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good lie right at our doors, and we don't recognize them."

The Christmas feast began late and took up a large part of the afternoon. The place of honor was given to a big Christmas goose which they had purchased from Mrs. Norton, and the cranberries were from their own swamp, and the pumpkins for the pies were of their own raising. It was, so far as they could make it, a real Bonnyacres dinner.

They were all ready to retire early that night, but for a little while they lingered about the fire, while Father read some of his favorite Dickens.

"I hesitate to follow Dickens with anything of my own," said Ethel, at the close of the last story, "but I have written some verses that you might perhaps like to hear."

The demand was loud and insistent, and so Ethel got out her manuscript and read aloud "The Babbitts on the Farm." There were twenty stanzas, full of jokes and sly digs, and references to what Uncle John would have called "historic Babbittisms." Laughter and applause followed each stanza

from all except Bollivar. Many of the references were incomprehensible to him, and the little fellow felt somehow out of it. Mother noticed his sober face; in fact, she had observed a vein of sadness mingled with Bollivar's merrymaking throughout the day. She reached out her arm and drew him to her.

"Something is troubling you," she said. "Tell me what it is."

At first he would not answer, and his old reserve fell upon him again. But they all seemed so sympathetic, and urged him in so friendly a manner, that at last he spoke.

"I don't know just how to say it," said he. "You've all been so good to me to-day and every day that I ought not to complain. But when I see you all having such a good time, I wish I had something that you've got."

"Tell us what it is," urged Mother, gently.

"You see," said Bollivar, wistfully, "I'm not really one of the Babbitts. You don't know how much I wish I were. I'd give anything to be a Babbitt. I want it more than anything else in the

world. I don't want to be Bollivar Brown; I want to be Bollivar Babbitt."

"Then Bollivar Babbitt you shall be, from this day on," said Father heartily.

There were tears in the little chap's eyes that he tried hard to conceal, and Mother kissed him softly.

"Indeed you shall," said she. "You shall be our own little boy, just as if you always had been, and you shall tell everybody that your name is Bollivar Babbitt."

"And you will be my own brother and Harold's," added Ethel.

Bollivar was not entirely satisfied, it must be confessed. Somehow he felt that this did not really make him a Babbitt, but he was deeply grateful to them, and he went to bed that night a happier boy. From that time on he signed his name "Oliver G. Babbitt," and that is how there came to be five Babbitts at Bonnyacres.

Cold weather continued after Christmas, but the Babbitts found plenty to do, and the children managed to get in to school every day except in the very worst weather. The winter wore on, and in Feb-

ruary there came a moderation of temperature. It was then that Father proposed that the apple trees be pruned.

"The dark o' the moon in February is the old rule," said he, "and I guess it's a good one."

So he and Harold bundled up well, took their pruning shears and knives and saws, and started out. It took them four days to finish, for they could not work long hours in the cold. And yet it was wonderful how invigorating the outdoor work in winter proved to be, and what fine appetites it gave them.

First they attacked the young trees that Harold had set out. They had made a good growth, some of the new shoots being three or four feet long. These they cut back halfway, trimming out also all shoots that were starting out in undesirable directions, and shaping the young trees in the way they should grow.

Then they started in on the big, old trees.

"I don't know how much they will stand," said Father, "but we may as well do a good job while we're at it. The idea is to cut out all dead or

broken or crowded branches, and cut back the old tops, so that a new head will form of younger bearing wood. The pruning will stimulate a rank growth of water sprouts and suckers next spring, and these we shall have to trim out in the summer, leaving a few that are strong and well placed to form the new head. This is the general plan, but I think we'd better not do it all this season. The old trees haven't been pruned for years, and the shock might be too great if we should slash away too murderously. Besides, we don't want to destroy all next year's fruit. We will cut out about half of the old wood this winter, I think, and finish the job next winter."

This idea of making over old trees into young ones interested Harold greatly, but he found it very difficult to decide what to cut out and what to leave.

"It's a matter of judgment and experience," said his father, "and hard-and-fast rules won't cover it. We'll go over the trees together, and after we have worked on several, you will catch the idea. Come on."

When they had finished, the old trees looked bare

and forlorn enough, but Father predicted that they would fill out fast enough the following season. And under each tree there was a big pile of brush. The larger wood they worked up for the fireplace during the following week, and the smaller stuff was carted to the middle of a snowy field and burned. It made a glorious bonfire.

March brought thawing weather and much mud, but the end of the month approached before there were any signs of spring.

“The season is always late up here,” said Father, “and I expect it will be the middle of April before any plowing can be done. However, we can be laying our plans, and meanwhile we can try our hands at a little maple sugar and syrup. These warm days and cold nights are just right for it.”

There were six or eight good-sized sugar maple trees on the place and these they tapped. The sap ran strong on sunny days, and all the pails and pans in the house were called into service to catch it. Harold kept watch of them and gathered the sap, and Mother and Ethel boiled it down. It seemed to take an immense amount of sap to make a little

syrup, but in the end they had a gallon of it and two pans of fine sugar.

Then they invited Miss Robbins and Hugh Norton in for the evening and had an old-fashioned sugaring-off party, cooling hot maple wax in snow and eating it with doughnuts and pickles. Mother found it pretty sickish, but the young folks managed to dispose of an astonishing amount of it, and without serious results.

“The capacity of the youthful stomach,” said Mother, “is sometimes beyond my comprehension.”

Late in March Father called a meeting of the family council to discuss plans for the year, and when they had finished, Ethel drew up the following schedule on paper:

“Plot 1. Harold will plant more apple trees to fill the plot. There will be clean cultivation up to July, and then soy beans will be planted. This, being a legume, will be turned under in the fall to supply nitrogen for the growing trees and will act as a summer cover. A winter cover of rye will then be planted. No other crops will be planted between the trees this year.

“Plot 4. On the lower portion that has been plowed, spread what poultry manure we have, fit the ground, and plant potatoes, putting commercial fertilizer in the hills during cultivation.

“Plot 6. Spread stable manure, plow and harrow, and plant field corn. Use an early-maturing dent corn for seed, to insure a crop.

“Plot 8. Spread manure, plow, harrow, and plant buckwheat, in accordance with the plan for a hay piece.

“Plot 10. Was manured in the fall. Plow under manure and rye, fit thoroughly, and use for garden, changing the position of the various vegetables from last year. Use lime if possible. Use the upper half for sweet corn for market, and plant two rows of early potatoes for home use. Have a trench dug and start a new asparagus bed.

“Plot 11. Manure and set out apple trees. Treat same as Plot 1.”

“That looks like a pretty ambitious program,” said Mother.

“Yes,” said Father, “it does, but it’s really no more than we attempted last year, and it promises

better results. I think we can manage it if Jabez comes back and we can afford to hire him sometimes. And please add, Ethel, to plow up another section of Plot 4 in the fall to work into our potato-and-hay scheme."

"Should the young trees have clean cultivation every year after this, Father, with soy beans in July?" asked Harold.

"We can tell better as time goes on," replied Mr. Babbitt. "When the trees make a heavy growth of soft wood, we will know that they have enough nitrogen, and then we can stop planting legumes, and cultivate all summer, sowing rye in the fall. When at last the trees come into bearing, and fruit rather than growth is the thing to be desired, I believe I should be in favor of fitting the ground and seeding the young orchards down to grass. I've been reading about the sod mulch system lately, and for our purposes I believe it would be better than to cultivate indefinitely. After that is done the orchard up-keep will be reduced materially."

"Would you cut the grass in the orchards?" asked Harold.

“Yes,” was the reply, “but not for hay. That would be robbing the trees. I would have the grass cut two or three times during the season and let it lie and rot on the ground. Nothing is better for fruit trees than that.”

“Well,” said Harold, “however we do it, I’m going to be an apple grower the rest of my life.”

“Until,” responded his father, with a smile, “you get interested more in something else.”

“You’ll see,” prophesied Harold.

CHAPTER XIII

DURING the winter the Babbitts had not forgotten the Bolivar mystery, as they had come to term it. They often spoke of it among themselves, but because no new facts had been brought to light they avoided further mention of it before Bolivar. In March, however, Father received a letter from Uncle John which was duly passed around and discussed. It ran as follows:

“ DEAR HENRY:—I know you will think I have been neglecting the question of that boy of yours, but I haven’t. I have been extremely busy this winter, but that matter has been on my mind, and I have made such inquiries as I could. I regret to say, however, that they have been nearly barren of results. The only information on record is very much like that which you sent me. I have discovered nothing else of significance.

“ I have just one ray of hope now, however, and I thought I might as well tell you about it, if only to show you that I haven’t been idle.

“ Quite by chance I recently ran across a man by the name of Peters. He is a pedantic old fellow

who was once a minister, I believe, and I find it very difficult to hold him down to brass tacks. But he has a good memory and good intentions, and I think I have aroused him to the point of doing something. I feel sure that he is taking a personal interest in the case.

" Mr. Peters is now connected with the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, but he was formerly connected with the State Board of Charities, or whatever the official name is, and we have figured it out that he must have been there at the time the child Oliver Goldsmith Brown was taken over by the authorities. That is something gained, for there doesn't seem to be a single responsible person in the Bureau now who was there when Bollivar's mother died. Mr. Peters is quite scornful at the way the matter was originally investigated and the records kept, but he thinks he may be able to find out something when he gets to work on the case. It is in his line, you know, and as a former employee of the Bureau he will know where to look and will doubtless be able to gain access to papers and things that would be denied me. I have been flattering him a little, and I think he feels a bit on his mettle. Anyway, it is a ray of hope, as I say. Whether it will prove to be more than a ray will remain to be seen.

"Please give my love to all the Babbitts, including Bollivar. "Your affectionate brother,
"JOHN."

"Well," said Mother, "what do you think of it?"

"I suppose I am naturally conservative," replied Father, "but I don't think I should build too much on this. As John says, it is only a ray of hope, and may easily come to nothing. I don't think I should say anything to Bollivar about it quite yet. It would do no good, and might lead to further disappointment."

Bollivar, however, never forgot the great wish of his heart. He was a happier boy now, more frank and merry, more like one of the Babbitts, but deep down in his heart there lay the constant longing to know who he was and who his parents had been.

Spring came with laggard feet, or so it seemed to the younger Babbitts who were anxious to start the season's farming and gardening. With April came warmer weather, but the frost came out of the ground slowly and it was too wet to plow.

Harold, unable to wait any longer, started things off by buying two young pigs for \$4 apiece and joining the Boys' Pig Club. His spare time he em-

ployed studying the subject of pig raising. Bollivar was still anxious to go more extensively into poultry. A man for whom he had done errands and small chores up on the hill near the schoolhouse gave him an old brooder, and with Father Babbitt's help he repaired this and got it into working order. Then came the problem of how to get chicks. Bollivar was disappointed because he had been unable to get and operate an incubator, but it had not seemed advisable.

"Let's try some other method first," said Father Babbitt, "and then see how we make out. Let's not invest in an incubator until we feel sure that we want one."

First Bollivar got some settings of fertile Barred Rock eggs, and set them under three of his old hens that were broody, but this seemed likely to prove too slow a process. Some one advised him to get some eggs from a dealer and have them hatched for him by some one who owned an incubator, but he could find no one in the neighborhood who had an incubator that was not working.

"There's one other way," said Father, "and that

is to buy day-old chicks. I have often seen them advertised."

They discussed the matter of breeds at some length. Bollivar was inclined to prefer Leghorns, as they were supposed to be the most consistent layers, but Father argued against them.

"In the first place," said he, "it isn't so much the breed as the strain that counts. I have seen other breeds lay just as well as Leghorns, and the eggs are larger. Besides, Leghorns lay white eggs. In the New York market white eggs are preferred, but up here the demand is rather for brownish eggs. I don't know why this is, but it's so.

"In the second place, Leghorns are harder to control. They are nervous, like to wander away, and can fly over anything.

"In the third place, they aren't worth much as table fowl. They are small and light, with but little meat on the breast. You will need to sell your cockerels in the fall, and you can get half as much again for Wyandotte cockerels as for Leghorns. Then when the hens get old, you will want to fatten them up for market, and weight will count again.

"Plymouth Rocks, both white and barred, and Rhode Island Reds are good general-purpose breeds, and there are others. But on the whole, I prefer White Wyandottes. They are the heaviest of all when it comes to dressing them, and though they are called a meat breed rather than an egg breed, I have known them to lay as well as any chickens going, when given proper treatment."

Bollivar was at last persuaded, and they ordered for him fifty day-old Wyandotte chicks. It did not prove to be an entirely successful method, and they decided not to purchase in that way again, but it served the purpose for that year. Six of the chicks were dead when they arrived, and ten more died soon after. Six more were sickly and never developed properly, so that Bollivar ended up with thirty-eight Wyandotte chickens and twenty-seven Barred Rocks which were hatched out under hens. That gave him plenty to take care of, and plenty to buy feed for, as he discovered before the summer was over. He also got a setting of White Pekin duck eggs, and one of the old hens hatched out eight yellow, fuzzy little ducklings.

One other thing the Babbitts learned, and that was that their cellar was not wholly suitable for storage. Some of the potatoes on the north side of the bins had been frost-bitten. Some of these began to rot in April, and others had a sweetish taste. Altogether, they lost over a bushel of their best potatoes and another bushel of the smaller ones that they were keeping for seed. The apples kept rather better, and there was still half a barrel of sound ones left on April 15th.

It was about April 15th that spring really came, and Father said they were lucky.

"I have known it to be so cold and stormy that not even peas would come up before May 10th, and it was useless to plant potatoes before May 15th. This climate has its drawbacks for the farmer. We may get late frosts yet, but once the ground gets warmed up and dried out a bit, we can begin. I think we shall have a fairly early spring for these hills, after all."

It proved to be true. On April 15th they saw the first bluebird, and Bollivar brought in an armful of big pussy willows. By the 20th it was so warm

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that the farmers working had to stop to mop their foreheads, and Ethel's peas and spinach, radishes and lettuce were shooting up rapidly. By the 25th they were able to plant the early potatoes in the garden plot. These dates will seem pretty late to farmers in warmer climates, but for the Massachusetts hills they were reasonably early. In May a late frost nipped some of the peach blossoms in the neighborhood, but did very little other damage.

But we are getting ahead of our story. Plowing was started the middle of April. Father arranged with a man in Devon to do it by contract. A man came out with his team and plow and made a good job of it, while George was thus released for other spring work, such as the spraying. The contractor charged \$6 a day for his man and team, but the work was done rapidly, about twelve acres being plowed in less than two weeks. Harold, whenever he could borrow Mr. Norton's horse to work with George, went over the plowed pieces with the wheel harrow, for this rush happened to come during his spring vacation.

April, indeed, was a very busy month, and both

Ethel and Harold stayed out of school a few days in addition to their vacation. Hugh Norton, stimulated by Harold's example, planned to set out some young apple trees on the Norton farm, and to take care of the old ones. He bought a new barrel sprayer of an improved type, and he and Harold sprayed the trees on both farms. Jabez, too, had come back, and was helping on both places. Mr. Norton, in view of the high price of grain of all sorts, was planting ten acres of spring wheat.

When the young fruit trees began to leaf out, Harold found to his dismay that a dozen or more of his precious apple trees were in a bad way. His father examined them and pronounced them to be the victims of three separate troubles. Five or six of them had turned black, and though they had started out well, Father said that when dry weather came they would die, either wholly or in part. The cause, he said, was winter killing, due to the intense cold, with perhaps not enough moisture at those particular spots. Several others had been girdled by mice or rabbits, and were doomed to succumb sooner or later. Others broke short off at a touch,

and appeared to be hollow. Father found in each of these a soft, fat worm, which he said was the apple tree borer.

"These things are bound to happen sometimes," said he, "though next year you may not lose a single tree."

"Can't it be prevented?" asked Harold.

"To some extent, yes," said Father. "I don't know of any cure for winter killing, but the danger of mice and borers may be reduced by more careful cultivation close to the trees. The mice make their nests in matted grass and weeds around the trees, and the borers are also hatched out there. Mice and rabbits may also be poisoned, or you can protect every tree by tying tar paper or wood veneer about them. These are laborious methods, however, and I would try one more year of cultivation, cleaning up around every separate tree in the fall by hand, using a potato hook and hoe. Hand work is worth while, anyway, and the trees will respond to it."

Harold ordered enough young trees to fill Plot 11 and the rest of Plot 1, and set them out when they came. The order included Baldwins, Green-

ings, McIntosh, and Wageners. There seemed to be a sure market for the first two, while McIntosh was recommended by all the authorities. The Wagener was included because of its splendid keeping qualities. Harold also had Northern Spy on his list, but decided to wait until another year before ordering any. Other varieties which he had made a note of for future needs were as follows: Red Astrakhan (if a market could be developed for so early an apple), Delicious, Esopus Spitzenburg (doubtful because subject to disease), Jonathan, Winesap, Tompkins County King, Winter Banana, Wealthy, Gravenstein, and Hubbardston Non-Such. On the whole, it seemed wisest to specialize in winter varieties, because the marketing period could be extended over a greater time and there was not so much danger of loss.

Ethel had gained valuable experience in gardening the previous season, and she was now putting that experience to good account. Before, she had not known how much to plant, or what to expect in the matter of yield. Now she was able to economize greatly in seed by planning in advance the amounts

needed by the family. For example, she decided to plant her lima beans farther apart, for bush limas make big plants, and if they do well a few of them will produce a large quantity. As for tomatoes, she decided that two dozen plants, well cared for, would be ample. These she started from seed in a box in the house in March. She had also started a few muskmelons in pots. On the other hand, she planned to plant more peas and beets and more sweet corn. She drew a diagram of her proposed garden, allotting so many feet of row to each vegetable, and planning the dates for a succession of such things as peas, sweet corn, lettuce, etc. A new bulletin of the Department of Agriculture on vegetable gardening helped her greatly.

She also started a new asparagus bed. She had Jabez dig two trenches, two feet deep and one hundred feet long, and filled them half full of well-rotted manure. She covered this with a layer of earth and set out two-year-old asparagus roots, eighteen inches apart. When the shoots appeared, she covered them with earth, repeating this process until her trenches were level full and the crowns

were securely buried a foot below the surface. She kept the rows cultivated during the summer, adding a dressing of fertilizer, and when the tops went to seed in the fall, she cut them down and burned them, so that no volunteer seedlings would start in the rows. The plan for the following year, after mulching during the winter, was to cultivate during the growing season, fertilizing during midsummer when the roots store up their vigor, but not cutting any of the shoots until the third year, when the plants would be well established. So far as she could judge from the first season's results, the asparagus did splendidly.

"They say," she said, "that you can cut ten bunches a day from a plot this size, and we surely ought to be able to find a market for it at a good price. Besides, the Babbitts love asparagus."

She not only planned for more winter vegetables than before, but to put up a quantity of peas, string beans, young beets, sweet corn, and other summer vegetables, as well as fruit and jelly, for winter use. She got bulletins on preserving from the Government, and an excellent series from Cornell, and

studied the matter carefully. Also, she joined a Girls' Canning Club.

"I don't expect to succeed with everything the first year," she said, "for it is harder to preserve vegetables than fruit, but I must get the experience some time, and it would certainly be fine if we could eat our own summer vegetables all winter. When I can afford it I shall get a steam pressure canner, but this year I shall have to do without it and learn what I can from the old-fashioned methods. Anyway, we shall have plenty of tomatoes and catsup, I promise you."

Ethel again found it difficult to get any time for flower gardening. She wanted to start a rose garden, but was obliged to postpone this again. She did, however, set out a few shrubs around the house, and laid out a plan for the general improvement of the place. And along by the stone wall north of the barn, where there was a good southern exposure, she started a long flower bed or border, planting perennials for the future and filling in with annuals for the first season's bloom. The perennials included hollyhocks, delphiniums, foxgloves, campa-

nulas, and hardy chrysanthemums, to be transplanted the following season, and for annuals she planted annual larkspur, California poppies, cosmos, dwarf nasturtiums, and one or two other things, as well as asters which she had started in the house in March. She wasn't able to give this little garden the attention it deserved, but the flowers bloomed and were a pretty sight from the windows of the house all through the last half of summer.

With the coming of the birds, Mother Babbitt resumed her Sunday nature study classes, and on April 28th they found the first shy arbutus in the little ravine by the brookside. The birds seemed more numerous than ever, now that they knew what to look for. Mother counted four varieties of warblers passing through on their spring migration, and said that there were doubtless others if they knew how to distinguish them. But the most interesting visitor was a cock pheasant, which Father said must have been one of those liberated the year before by the state authorities. He was a handsome creature, but his voice was harsh and strident. The sight of the chickens seemed to at-

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tract him, and as he became more and more accustomed to the presence of human beings, he became bolder, sometimes venturing as close as the barn door in search of oats. He was such a haughty, strutting individual that the Babbitts named him **Solomon**.

CHAPTER XIV

SO far as the general program was concerned, the second year of farming at Bonnyacres was much like the first, but everything seemed to go a little more smoothly, and they knew better what to plan for and what to expect. They had not become expert farmers yet, but they had learned some things, and they were able to avoid a good many of the mistakes of the first year. Consequently, I shall be able to hasten over some of the details, for after all, this is the story of the Babbitts, and not a treatise on agriculture.

Beauty had come through the winter in good shape and was now a yearling heifer, with short little horns and a growing body. Mr. Norton predicted that she would make a better cow than her mother. She was tame and loving, and the treatment she had received as a pet had much to do with her bodily welfare. For a Jersey is a nervous animal, and if she is kept happy she makes better progress.

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In May another calf was born, but it was a bull calf, and so was destined to go to the butcher. They refrained from making a pet of him, in spite of his cunning ways, for they did not wish to become too much attached to him. They did not even name him. Nevertheless, when he was led away to be killed two months later, there was much sorrow in the Babbitt family. It did seem dreadful that so happy and promising a creature should suffer so dire a fate.

"Still," said Father, "the end will be quick and merciful, and the little fellow has never known anything but youth and comfort. That's something."

The calf weighed 120 pounds when dressed and brought \$21.60 into the family coffer.

In May the potatoes were planted, as planned, and toward the last of the month, the corn. Ethel made good progress with her garden, and Hugh and Harold gave the apple trees their second spraying.

Altogether, the Babbitts were very fortunate in being able to coöperate with the Nortons, and in being able to hire Jabez occasionally. All about them the farmers were complaining about the

scarcity and the high price of labor. Men who had worked in previous years for \$2 a day were now asking \$2.50 and \$2.75, and a good many of them had left the farms to work in mills or on the roads, where the wages were good. And when they worked at farming, they expected steady employment. If the Babbitts had not been able to solve the labor problem in other ways, they would have had to curtail their operations materially, which would have been very discouraging.

"I don't know what will become of our New England farms if the labor situation doesn't improve," said Father. "The Poles make good workers, but they are mostly raising tobacco and onions on their own farms now. Let us hope that we can manage Bonnyacres without labor troubles. For that reason, if for no other, we must go slowly."

Cultivating began in June, and the pigs, chickens, and garden all received their share of attention. In the swamp the wild azaleas bloomed lavishly, and later the laurel in the pines. Under Mother's guidance, the Babbitts became familiar with the wild flowers of the section, but Scout's chief interest in

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nature study appeared to lie in the investigation of woodchuck holes.

Though the spring-tank refrigerator had proved satisfactory up to a certain point, the need for more room was felt, and Father built a new kind of ice-less refrigerator which was kept in the woodshed. It proved very successful. He built a wooden frame which he first covered with screening and then buttoned strips of canton flannel outside of that, covering the whole frame including the door. Shelves were built inside and a pan was fitted on top. This was kept filled with water, and in it were placed loose strips of flannel so as to hang down over the sides. The water seeped down through these wicks and kept the entire outside of the refrigerator damp. The evaporation lowered the temperature inside, so that on dry, hot days it did not rise over fifty degrees. Not everything could be kept in this on account of the dampness, but it proved a great help to Mother.

On June 20th the schools closed, and the younger Babbitts were able to devote all their attention to their departments of the farm work. Ethel, now

eighteen, graduated from high school, and was chosen to write the class poem. Hugh Norton sent her a bunch of roses, which she wore at the graduation exercises.

Ethel was, indeed, coming to like Hugh better, and his constant attentions did not annoy her so much. She had begun to discover that he was a youth of sterling qualities, and she was learning to overlook some of the roughnesses which were, after all, only on the surface. But alas for Hugh, an episode occurred that placed him in a shadow again.

Solomon, the cock pheasant, suddenly disappeared. Hugh had often said that he would make fine eating, partly to tease Ethel, and she thought she had reason to believe that Hugh had shot him. If she had accused him of this he would have had a chance to explain, but she was impulsive by nature and she did not give him a chance. She merely assumed that he had done the deed, and she despised him for it. It seemed to her that he had committed an unpardonably ruthless act. She felt badly about it, not only because the beautiful visitor was gone, but because her growing faith in Hugh's

goodness of heart was shattered. In spite of her mother's pleading, she would not speak to Hugh, and he was for a long time mystified by her attitude. When he at last found out what the trouble was it appeared to be too late to rectify matters, and he was obliged to make the best of it, though he was evidently an unhappy young man.

With July came haying again, and the routine of summer work in the garden and on the farm. Ethel began her work of preserving. At first she made mistakes, and some of her work went for nothing. It was very hot and discouraging, but she persisted, and the final result was several shelves of jars filled with fruit and vegetables for the winter.

"I don't believe I shall figure much in the work of the Canning Club this year," said she, "but I have learned something, and next year I will do better, especially if I can have one of those steam-pressure outfits."

The Babbitts were obliged to forego a good many desirable purchases, but one thing they did blow themselves to, as Harold expressed it, and that was a second-hand Ford. It so happened that Father

received a check for \$500 late in July from the settlement of an estate that had long been in process of litigation. It was a most acceptable windfall to the Babbitts, and a long consultation was held as to the best method of making use of it. It was finally decided to devote \$100 to clothes and other urgent necessities. Another \$100 was put in the bank to swell their depleted fund for running expenses of the farm. Another \$100 was put in the savings bank for a rainy day, and \$200 bought the Ford.

It was Father's own proposal. They had often spoken of the day when they might own a car, but they had not hoped for one so soon. Mother, indeed, was quite astounded at the suggestion of such extravagance, but she was at last won over. Father pointed out to her that it would really be economy in the end. The trip to town could be made in a few minutes, while George could go on with the farm work. It would give them all much pleasure and would be a great convenience in many ways, tying them closer to civilization, as Ethel said.

Father did quite a little shopping about before

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he was satisfied, but at last he purchased a year-old car in good condition, and the agent ran it out to Bonnyacres and gave them lessons in running it. When at last these preliminaries were over, and the owner's and operators' licenses were properly obtained, there was rejoicing at Bonnyacres. The Babbitts were at last the owners of an automobile!

Father, whose nerves were steady and whose judgment was good, was the first to learn how to run it, and from him Harold and Ethel took lessons and soon became proficient, while even Bollivar was occasionally allowed to try his hand at the wheel. But expertness did not come in a day, and the hilly, rough country roads offered difficulties to the beginners. Later on, when it had all become very easy to them, they wondered how it could have given them so much trouble, but that is always the way at first.

One of the carriage sheds was cleared out and made into a garage, and the first time Ethel tried backing out of it she jammed the mud-guard against the side of the doorway. Harold, on the

occasion of his first venture as chauffeur, succeeded in running over and killing one of Mrs. Norton's Indian Runner ducks as he turned the corner into the main road. But the worst trial came with Father at the wheel.

They had taken the car out after supper for a little practice run and had gone about five miles from home when they decided it was time to turn around and return if they wanted to get back before dark. The road was narrow, and Father began looking for a spot wide enough to turn around in. At last he selected a place where a branch road came in at right angles, with a little delta of grass between the two rounded turns. Here he started to turn around, but the delta proved to be boggy, and Father, who was turning very cautiously in the way of a beginner, had shut the throttle down too far. The front wheels went down into the mud and the engine stalled.

Harold jumped promptly out and tried to crank up, but nothing happened. Father got out and tried his hand at it, first pulling out the priming rod to let more gas into the carbureter, but he was equally

unsuccessful. For half an hour they struggled with increasing discouragement, until they began to fear that something serious was the matter with the engine. They were all more or less flustered and worried.

“What can be the matter?” asked Mother.

“I wish I knew,” said Father.

“Shan’t we leave the old thing and go home?” asked Ethel. “This road seems to be deserted.”

It was indeed a lonely spot. The only house within sight showed no signs of life and it was getting dark. Worst of all, none of them had thought to bring any matches to light the lamps, and the headlights on a Ford don’t light till the motor is started.

“Bollivar,” said Father, “suppose you run up to that house and beg some matches. We at least ought to light the lamps. We’ll rest a while and then go at it again.”

Bollivar did as he was bidden, and before long he was seen returning in company with a man.

“Help at last!” sighed Ethel.

Just as the man and Bollivar came up, Harold gave the crank a tentative turn, and much to his astonishment the engine started.

"Now how in the world did that happen?" he asked.

The man stood and grinned.

"You flooded your carbureter, that's all," said he. "Every time you pulled out the priming rod you let in more gas than she could use. After you'd cranked a while and got the extra gas out, she started. I was going to show you if you hadn't got her going as you did."

The man said he had a car of his own, and he gave them some useful bits of information before they left. They thanked him heartily and Father again took the wheel.

"Give her plenty of gas now, getting out of there," said the man.

Father did as directed, and soon they were humming along the road on the way home.

"Well, I hope we shan't have another experience like that," said Mother. "I thought we were stuck for good."

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"It won't happen again," said Father. "We'll learn."

And learn they did. It wasn't long before the three drivers all learned the feel of the thing, so that there was never any question of stalling or of making the wrong move, and after that it all became good fun. The engine proved to be an excellent one, and Father's mechanical ability was sufficient to keep it in running order, once he came to understand it. It was extraordinary how often a trip to town seemed necessary after the advent of the car, until the novelty wore off, and on Sundays there was a pleasure trip whenever the weather was pleasant.

"But we mustn't forget the use of our legs," warned Mother. "Walking has its advantages, you know."

The car, in short, proved to be possessed of possibilities for pleasure as well as usefulness. The children named it Henrietta, and they never regretted its purchase.

"I don't see how we ever got along without it," was the general verdict.

August activities proceeded in their normal course, and Harold and Ethel attended Farmer's Week meetings in town, and learned many useful things. Father and Mother Babbitt had been a little worried for fear Ethel, after graduating from school, would want to leave home and become a teacher or something of that sort, but she showed no signs of it. In fact, farming and country life appeared to interest her more than ever, and she did not even refer to her old, cherished plan of going to college.

"It is just as well," said Father, "for we may not be able to send her, but I still hope we can, and if so the surprise will be none the less pleasant. I think she will have to stay out a year and help us, and perhaps next year we can arrange to have her enter Smith. She would still be young enough, and would lose very little by that plan. And I don't believe college will wean her away from the farm either. College girls have done worse things than become farmers' wives," he added, with a smile.

So the matter was left, and when Harold went

back to high school in September, Ethel remained contentedly at home to help with the work of the farm and the household. But deep in her heart she still dreamed of college.

Late in August Father received another letter from Uncle John. It was a short letter, and one that hinted at more than it told, but it led the Babbits to hope that something might yet come out of the Bolivar investigation.

Mr. Peters, it seemed, had been unable to learn anything from the authorities, but he at last managed to unearth some of Mrs. Brown's effects which, for some reason, had never been destroyed. Uncle John was not quite clear as to how this had been accomplished, but he spoke in terms of praise of Mr. Peters's persistence and his devotion to his quest. Among these things, it appeared, some old letters had been found—Uncle John did not say from whom—which led to the conclusion that Bolivar's father had been living at the time of his mother's death, and that he was somewhere out of the country. It was also evident that Mr. Brown had been a man of education, and that he had

been very fond of his family and had not deserted them.

“ Some day these letters will belong to Bollivar,” wrote Uncle John, “ and I think he will have reason to value them highly. At present, however, we shall keep them and see if they may not lead to some further clue. Thus far we have no evidence to prove whether Mr. Brown is now alive or dead, and we don’t really know who he was, though we have a general idea which I will tell you about in case it proves to be correct. Meanwhile, that is about all I have to report, but we shall go ahead along this line and you may be sure that I will notify you of any new discoveries.”

The Babbitts were all rather excited by this letter. It suggested so many mysterious things about Bollivar’s father, and they hoped eagerly that more information would be forthcoming.

“ It is just like a story book,” exclaimed Ethel. “ Don’t you think we could tell Bollivar?”

“ I will tell him that Uncle John is working on the case,” replied Father, “ for I know it is never out of his mind, and I don’t like to have him think

that nothing is being done. But I think that we shouldn't tell him any of the details until we know more."

August drifted into September and harvesting began. Everything seemed to be going well when a tragedy happened at Bonnyacres—or they feared it was a tragedy. Scout disappeared one evening, and the next day he did not return. He had often been off on hunting expeditions of his own, and they did not think much about it until night, when Harold began to be anxious. He walked all over the farm and out into the woods until after dark, whistling and calling, but still no Scout.

On the third day Harold arose early and announced that he wasn't going to do another thing until he had found his dog. They were all rather solemn that morning, for they had come to love Scout dearly, and it seemed dreadful to abandon him to some possibly untoward fate without doing anything about it.

Harold called up every one he could think of on the telephone, but no one had seen anything of

Scout. Mr. Terwilliger searched the woods about his place, but with no result. Harold cranked up the car and covered the country for miles around before noon, but without learning anything definite. The suggestion that some one made, that Scout had perhaps been caught in a trap in the woods, did not make him any happier.

“It wouldn’t seem so bad if he got sick and died, but to have him away off somewhere, perhaps hurt and unable to get back, seems worse,” groaned the boy.

He and Ethel started out again in the afternoon, but without much hope. No one noticed Hugh Norton. After Harold and Ethel had gone, Hugh, who cared more for Scout than any of them knew, started off alone in another direction. He had his own ideas as to Scout’s whereabouts, and he knew the woods like a book and the location of most of the traps.

He came back toward supper time, shortly after the return of the unsuccessful and sorrowing Babbitts. In his strong arms he bore a black-and-white burden.

"Oh, Hugh," cried Harold, rushing out of the house, "is he alive? Where did you find him?"

"He's alive, all right," Hugh assured him, "but he's hurt and weak from loss of blood and no food. I guess he must have struggled pretty hard. He's all in."

They laid the dog tenderly on some sacking in the woodshed, and Ethel brought him a saucer of warm milk, which he drank eagerly. He watched them with weary, suffering, but happy eyes, and licked their hands when they came near enough.

"Poor old boy," murmured Hugh, softly, "I guess you're glad to be back."

Upon examination they found that his left hind leg was broken and badly lacerated. Father bound it up as well as he could and telephoned into Devon for a veterinarian.

"There's life in the old dog yet," said Father. "We'll have him around in shape again before long."

"Now, Hugh," said Ethel, after Scout had been made as comfortable as possible, and they had all

petted him to their heart's content, "tell us how you found him."

It was the first time she had spoken to Hugh for several weeks, and her voice was very gentle. It was evident that she might find it in her heart to forgive one who had shown himself so kind to an animal. Hugh colored hotly, and at first did not look at her.

"It was up by Lee's Pond, away off from everywhere, about four miles from here, I reckon. I'd been to all the other places I could think of. I kept whistling, and at last I heard a little hoarse bark. He couldn't make much noise, but I was able to find him. He had gone for some bait, just as I thought, and was caught in a trap. He'd pretty near cut his foot off trying to get out. I had to carry him all the way home, poor old fellow."

"You certainly deserve our gratitude, Hugh," said Father Babbitt, and Hugh blushed again.

"I'm glad I found him," he replied, awkwardly. Then suddenly he raised his head and looked into Ethel's eyes. "It wasn't one of my traps, Miss Ethel," said he. "I haven't set any this year."

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It was her turn to blush now, and to be confused, but she rose to the occasion.

“I believe you, Hugh,” she said quietly, and held out her hand. Hugh took it, and then Ethel turned and hurried into the house.

CHAPTER XV

HAROLD'S potatoes turned out better than the crop of the first year. They had been planted on new land, where the decaying sod and the rye had given abundant humus and plant food, and they had been well cultivated, fertilized, and sprayed. From the acre on Plot 4 nearly one hundred bushels were dug, and the small garden plot did even better in proportion.

"Potatoes are not a crop that we could get rich on at Bonnyacres," said Father Babbitt, "but when you get a hundred bushels to the acre and the price is over \$1 a bushel, it pays. Besides, potatoes are a household necessity, and if every farmer in the United States planted one acre, there would be no shortage."

The potatoes were more carefully sorted and stored than they had been the previous year, and it looked as though there would be a good quantity to

sell later on. They decided to save only a few for seed, on the ground that new seed should be purchased every year or two to keep up the quality. The corn also showed an improvement over the first year, and it all matured before harvesting.

The plum trees had borne heavily, and Ethel tried her hand at putting some up in salable jars, with a printed label. There were two dozen pint jars which she sent to their old grocer in Elton as an experiment. He sold them out very promptly and wrote to Ethel saying that he would take all of that sort of thing that she could furnish the next year.

Miss Robbins returned to take charge of the district school and the Community House for one year more, and soon after school had opened and Harold and Bollivar had started in, Miss Robbins came to spend the evening at Bonnyacres. Much to their surprise they found her somewhat discouraged.

"I really accomplish so little," said she. "It might be worse, I know, but the children who go from my school to the high school in Devon are

never as well prepared as I wish they were, and they have a hard time there at first. I can keep order in the school, and I think I am able to teach the children some useful things, but when it comes to actual education, I know that my school and others like it are below par. We country teachers have our hands too full to progress very far with modern educational problems. I attended a teachers' institute this summer, and when I learned of all the things that are being done elsewhere, it made me discouraged."

"It isn't your fault, Miss Robbins," said Father; "it's the fault of the system. What we need in Massachusetts and other New England states is a stronger centralized government and greater state control of rural life. The country districts here are backward because many of the best people have gone away, and they haven't left much in the way of progressive leadership. Rural New England appears to be incapable of lifting itself up by its boot-straps, and the state has got to do it sooner or later.

"Take the matter of roads, for example. Since

we have had Henrietta, I have realized more than ever before how wretched our hill roads are. They are a disgrace to the old Bay State. But it seems impossible to effect much improvement. Now and then a state road is put through between two towns, but for the most part the towns have to look after their own roads, and they simply cannot afford to rebuild them and keep them in good condition. I believe the state should take over the maintenance of all roads, taxing each town and city pro rata, and spending the money where it is most needed. That is the only really democratic method, the only way to produce the best results for all the people.

"It is the same way with the schools," he continued. "The small towns cannot afford to pay good teachers or to hire enough of them, and the small ungraded district school presents all the difficulties you have encountered. The time must come when the state will take over this whole educational problem, establish consolidated schools and a proper standard that all must live up to, and wipe out the small, inefficient crossroads school. Meanwhile, you

are doing so much better than the average that you have no reason to be discouraged, and some day you may find better opportunities opening before you."

"Well," said Sylvia, a little encouraged, "I shall continue to do my bit the best I can for this year at least. And at least I must say that I am glad to get back to these beautiful hills. There are compensations."

Ethel, realizing how her friend felt, took pains to invite her down to Bonnyacres more often, and she became almost a sixth member of the Babbitt family.

Sylvia Robbins had a sense of humor, too, and it was she who started the laughter when poor old Mehitabel got drunk. At least, Mr. Norton said she got drunk, and Sylvia at least considered that the most interesting explanation. It was all because Harold and Bollivar had neglected to keep the windfalls picked up in the old orchard back of the barn, and Mehitabel had attended to the matter for them. Mr. Norton estimated that she must have eaten two bushels of them. Father was inclined to think that

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they produced a form of colic, but Mr. Norton insisted that it was plain intoxication.

"They will do it," he said with a grin. "The best of 'em will do it. The apples make cider in one of their stomachs and the next stomach gets it after it is fermented. Then they just can't leave the apples alone."

Whatever truth there may have been in this theory, Mehitabel certainly acted like an inebriate. Her eyes were dull and stupid looking, and she staggered when they led her into the barn. The Babbitts were alarmed until Mr. Norton came and reassured them, and then Sylvia Robbins burst into a fit of laughter and they all began to see the funny side of it. Poor old Mehitabel! She certainly looked as though she had fallen from grace. That night she gave no milk at all, but Mr. Norton gave her a big dose of linseed oil and in a day or two she had recovered, though she gave four quarts less milk a day from that time on.

"Next year we'll be more careful," promised Harold.

In October the apple crop was harvested, and all

the Greenings and some Baldwins were sent to Mr. Collins in Elton. They had seen to it that there were plenty of barrels on hand this time. They also tried packing a few of the finest eating apples in boxes. Instead of using wooden boxes after the Western method, Harold bought a hundred corrugated cardboard boxes, each holding nearly a bushel. Labels were printed giving the number and variety of the apples, the grade, and all the other facts required by the state law. Harold had a hundred circulars printed in Devon and sent them to various city friends and acquaintances, offering the best quality fruit, wrapped in paper and carefully sorted, at \$3 a box, express prepaid. Each box held about a hundred apples. The price seemed high to Mr. Norton, but the city people did not seem to think so, for Harold received orders for over twenty boxes before Christmas. The express averaged forty cents a box and the boxes cost about fifteen cents apiece, so that the net income was about \$2.45 a box. Father had been a little in doubt as to the possibility of shipping fruit safely in cardboard boxes, and complaints were received from the first

two customers, but Harold soon learned the secret of close packing and rigid sealing and tying of the boxes, and after that they shipped perfectly and made a very attractive package.

In October, too, Bollivar's pullets began to lay, and he commenced selling out his cockerels. There were about thirty of these, and half a dozen were taken in to the butcher in Devon on each trip that Henrietta made to town. That left thirty-five pullets to furnish eggs all winter, and after they began laying well, Bollivar sold his old hens, which left the old poultry house less crowded.

Harold's pigs were also marketed. They had talked of home butchering, home-cured ham and bacon, and home-made lard and sausage, but Mother had objected so strenuously to turning Bonnyacres into a slaughter-house, that they had abandoned the idea.

"It's bad enough to kill chickens," said she, "and I draw the line there."

The pigs had done very well, though they were not prize pigs by any means, and Harold planned for a further venture in this line the following year.

Beauty, however, turned out to be a prize heifer. It was Hugh Norton who proposed taking her to the County Fair.

"I tell you she's the finest heifer in these parts," said he, "and she would take a prize."

So they washed her and combed her, and dressed her for the party, and Hugh led her down to the fair grounds at Devon. There she attracted her full share of admiration, and when the awards were given out, Beauty won first prize for the best yearling dairy heifer. The Babbitts all attended the fair, and Beauty knew them at once, and came up to the edge of her little enclosure to have her neck scratched.

But Beauty was not the only prize winner at the fair. Hugh also persuaded Ethel to let him take down some of her grape jelly and plum preserves, and she took a third prize.

"Next year," said Hugh, "you must have a bigger assortment ready, and then you'll take first prize. You put up the finest preserves I ever saw."

Gradually another season drew to its close.

The soy beans in the orchards were turned under and rye was planted. Some fall plowing was done, including another piece of Plot 4 in the plan for meadow renovation. The garden was cleaned up, and by November nearly everything had been made shipshape for another winter.

Then came another letter from Uncle John. It was a very short letter, and it mystified them.

"We're hot on the trail at last," it read. "Just where it leads I shall be better able to tell you later, but I think you will hear something in a few days that will interest you."

"What in the world can it mean?" asked Ethel.

"I don't know," said Father, "but you may depend upon it that Uncle John wouldn't have written that way if he hadn't learned something definite. He doesn't go off at half cock. We must be patient and see what develops."

It was two days, however, before any further news reached them, and then there came a letter addressed to Father in a strange hand. It read as follows:

“MR. HENRY D. BABBITT,

“Bonnyacres,

“Devon, Mass.

“DEAR SIR:—I have recently encountered Mr. Peters and Mr. John Babbitt here in Boston, and have learned of their investigation into the origin of Oliver Goldsmith Brown, the boy who is living with you. For some time I have been trying to learn of his whereabouts, though I have been very busy with other things. Last week, however, I made inquiries at the State Bureau of Charities, and was referred to Mr. Peters, who introduced me to your brother. I have some important news to communicate to you and to the boy, and your brother thinks it would be desirable for me to do so in person. This I shall be very glad to do if you will permit me to call on you as soon as my other affairs will permit me to get away.

“Awaiting your reply, I am,

“Very truly yours,

“FRANKLIN RUSSELL.”

“Well, what do you make of that?” inquired Mother Babbitt.

“I should judge that this must be the hot trail that John spoke of,” said Father. “Of course, I don’t know what it means, but I believe that Mr. Russell knows something about Bollivar’s father, or

he wouldn't go to all this trouble to come to see us. I think the least we can do is to send him a cordial invitation to come to Bonnyacres, and then we shall learn from his own lips whatever he may have to tell us. Perhaps it may prove to be a solution of the Bollivar mystery at last."

"Don't you think you could tell Bollivar now?" asked Mother.

"Yes," said Father, "he ought to know in advance that some one is coming and what it is about."

Accordingly Father wrote to Mr. Russell, inviting him to visit the Babbitts at Bonnyacres, and then he called Bollivar to him.

"My boy," said he, "I have something to tell you that I think you will like to hear. I know how all your life you have been wondering about your parents, and longing to know who they were. We have understood how you felt, and have been trying to unravel the mystery, but we haven't said much about it to you because it might come to nothing and you might only be disappointed. Now, however, I think it safe to say that we are on the track

of some real information. My brother John, a Boston lawyer, has been working on the case, and now he has found a man who may know something of value. His name is Mr. Russell. I don't think he can be your father himself, or he would have come at once to see you, but he may be able to tell us who your father was and what became of him. So we have invited him here, and when he comes you shall hear whatever he has to tell. Won't you be glad?"

For a time Bollivar was silent. As he sat there in his chair, gazing out of the window with a far-away look in his big eyes, Father could not help thinking what a fine lad he had become. Under Mother Babbitt's softening influence and Ethel's sympathetic companionship, he had developed remarkably. Though still thoughtful by nature, and often silent, he had become frank and confiding; there was nothing secretive about the boy. He was sincere and truthful, ambitious and willing, and Father Babbitt felt his heart going out to him as to a son of his own. Bollivar, too, was intelligent and quick to learn, and his character gave promise of

many sterling qualities. He was a good-looking boy, rugged and healthy.

"He will make a fine man some day," thought Father.

"Yes," said Bollivar at length, "I'm glad, of course. I've always wanted to know, as you say. But lately——"

He fell again into silence, and Father watched his thoughtful, troubled face as he sat there.

"Something bothers you?" asked Father.

"Well," replied Bollivar. "You see I'm a Babbitt now, or you let me call myself so. If I find my father I will be Oliver Brown again. I can't be both, can I?"

"You like being a Babbitt?" asked Father, kindly.

Bollivar turned quickly and looked into his eyes. "Oh, yes," he cried. "Now that I know what it is to be a Babbitt, I'd rather be that than anything else in the world."

"Well, we like you best as a Babbitt, and we love to have you really one of us," said Father. "Shall

we tell Mr. Russell not to come, and forget all about your father?"

"No," said Bollivar slowly, "that wouldn't do, either. I must find out all I can about the Brown part of me first, and then——"

"And then," said Father, "it may turn out that you can be a Babbitt after all."

"Oh, if I only could!" said Bollivar.

"I think Bollivar was right," said Father to Mother Babbitt later. "If it should turn out that his father is living, he will of course belong to him. If not, and if everything seemed to be all right, we might—we might adopt him. He is a good boy, none better, and I am sure it would make him very happy. Would you consider it, Emma?"

"Oh Henry," she cried, "you know I always wanted three. And I love Bollivar."

CHAPTER XVI

IT was some time before Mr. Russell was able to come to Bonnyacres, and meanwhile November and cold weather had come. The winter's supply of wood and coal were put in, the old chicken house was rebuilt and improved and additional nest boxes constructed, the house was banked up, and the potatoes, apples, and winter vegetables carefully protected. As Father had predicted, the grapes bore only moderately, but the vines looked thrifty, and he and Harold gave them another pruning. Most of the corn, except what they needed for George and the chickens, had been sold. Jabez had left for his winter in Maine.

“Now,” said Father, as they gathered about the fire one evening after the supper dishes had been washed and put away, “we have reached another milestone. Another year has been completed at Bonnyacres, and it would be well to take account of stock. All those who feel more encouraged than

they did a year ago will please raise the right hand."

Four hands went promptly into the air.

"Good," said Father. "We have many reasons for congratulating ourselves," he continued. "We have learned how to live on a farm without hardship. We have learned how to economize money and labor. All those who are satisfied to remain at Bonnyacres indefinitely will please indicate by the same sign."

Again the four hands went up.

"Now let's review the matter a little," Father went on. "In the first place, our balance sheet, according to Ethel's carefully kept accounts, looks better than it did a year ago. We are still poor and must continue to economize, and the farm really isn't paying yet. But our expenses have been no greater, we have added materially to our assets, and we have realized some little income. Apart from what Ethel and Bollivar have taken in for vegetables, preserves, eggs, and cockerels, we have made something out of the calf, the corn, and the apples, and the potatoes will bring still more. More than

that, we have improved our tillable land fifty per cent. by cultivation, fertilizing, and turning under green crops. There is more humus and more plant food in the soil, and it will produce better crops. The young orchards are thriving and the whole place looks as well as any farm in this neighborhood. If we were to sell next spring we could get fifty per cent. more for Bonnyacres than we could have done eighteen months ago. We are improving our hay land, and I anticipate a paying crop from that in another year. It is all the difference between progress and retrogression, if that isn't too big a word to use. A farm cannot stand still; it must either go ahead or go backward. Bonnyacres is going ahead, and going ahead fast, and we may yet be able to show our neighbors, experienced farmers as many of them are, that there is still hope in the run-down New England farm."

"How about next year?" suggested Harold.

"I think our definite plans can wait until March," said Father. "It is no longer a novelty to us and planning is easier than it was at first. I expect we shall continue our plan for meadow renovation, keep

up our live stock and the young orchards, and plant a little corn and potatoes. Those things, with a good garden, are about all we need or can well manage."

"Well," said Harold, "I want to have more pigs and some bees. I believe in adding something each year to what we have done before."

"There speaks the energy and ambition of youth," said Father with a smile. "All right, son, I think you have shown yourself capable of sticking at what you start out to accomplish, and that is the test of a promising young farmer. Any other suggestions?"

"My ducks have done pretty well," said Bollivar. "I'd like to try half a dozen turkeys. It would be fine to eat our own turkey at Thanksgiving and Christmas and have some to sell besides. They bring awful big prices."

"True," said Father, "but you must remember that the high prices are due largely to the high mortality among turkeys. The consumer has to pay for a good many that have died. Turkeys are the hardest of all poultry to raise, and most of the farmers

hereabouts who have tried them have been unsuccessful. However, you might prove to be the exceptional case. I can see no harm in trying turkeys. Next!"

"I shall go in for more preserves," said Ethel, "and I want to start a strawberry patch. I've been reading up on strawberries, and I am sure I could make something out of them."

"Anything else?" asked Father. "Mother, we haven't heard from you."

"Well, you see, I'm not one of the producers," said she, "but if some one would invent some way of making ice here, it would be a great help. Our iceless refrigerators are all right so far as they go, but they won't serve for everything—meat, for example—and you can't make iceless ice-cream."

"True," said Father, "and I have been thinking about making an ice pond for some time. By doing a little excavating and building a concrete dam across our brook, I think we could make a shallow pond between the house and Plot 11. It would be a beautiful thing to see, and I don't think it would

breed any more mosquitoes than the swampy land does. We could stock it with fish and Ethel could plant pond lilies in it and iris about the banks. Then in winter we could get Mr. Norton and Hugh to help us harvest the ice and perhaps get enough to sell to the whole neighborhood. We have no lack of freezing weather here, that's one thing, but we would have to build a good ice-house. I don't know whether we can undertake this next year, but we'll do it sometime.

"And while we are talking about the future, I have another plan. I think we could develop enough water power in the brook, where it forms a cascade below the barn, to run a dynamo and generate electricity. How would you like to have electric lights all over the house, Mother, and not have to bother with lamps any more?"

"Oh, that would be fine!" she replied. "Do you really think it could be done?"

"I don't know," he answered, "but we'll look into it sometime. And when our ship comes in we'll have this old house gone over from cellar to garret and made as good as new."

"Oh, but we don't want a new house," protested Ethel. "The old one is so much nicer."

"It would still be the old house," said Father, "only made tight and true, painted and papered, and fixed to suit Mother. Meanwhile, however, our ship is still out at sea, and there's a lot of work yet to be done."

"And meanwhile," added Mother, "Scout is snoring so loud I can hardly hear what's said. Put him to bed, Harold; it's time we all turned in."

On the day following this family conference, Mr. Russell arrived. A telegram was relayed over the telephone to Father in the morning, and in the afternoon Harold took Henrietta in to Devon to meet their guest. It was Saturday, and he would probably stay over Sunday, so Mother and Ethel busied themselves with preparations.

"Do you realize," said Mother, "that this is the first real company we've had since we came to Bonnyacres?"

"Isn't it awful?" replied Ethel. "I thought country people were usually overrun with company

all summer. I'm afraid we've been awfully inhospitable."

"Well, we've had our hands pretty full," said Mother. "But next year we will surely reform. Father has already invited Uncle John, and we'll try to have some of our other relatives and old Elton friends. That will be my undertaking for next year."

Mr. Russell proved to be a large, hearty sort of man, easy to get acquainted with, and he and Harold were already friends by the time they reached Bonnyacres. He was evidently a widely traveled person, with a knowledge of agriculture not only of the United States but of other countries as well. Harold found him to be a mine of interesting information.

Mother explained to him that they would have their regular Saturday night supper—baked beans and Boston brown bread, with baked apples and cream and sponge cake for dessert. Mr. Russell was delighted.

"That will seem like old times," he said. "I'm afraid the baked bean custom is dying out in New

England, but that was the regular Saturday night supper when I was a boy. You couldn't have pleased me better."

Mother was much gratified by his evident enjoyment of the meal, and he also praised Ethel's catsup. But he didn't seem inclined to talk very much until the edge of his appetite had been dulled. All the Babbitts, including Bollivar, of course, were intensely eager to learn the facts that he had come to tell them, but they bided their time as patiently as they could until the baked apples were brought on, when Harold could stand it no longer.

"Would it spoil the dessert for you, Mr. Russell," he asked, "if you were to begin to tell us now what you know about Bollivar?"

Mr. Russell laughed. "Dear me, no," said he, "but these good things had almost put it out of my mind. You must forgive me. I won't delay any longer, but will start in at once. It is a long story that I have to tell, and I hope you will pardon me if I get at it in my own way. I always like to go back to the beginning of things. And if I tell more about myself in this connection than seems neces-

sary, it will only be so that you will understand why I am personally so much interested in the case.

"The story has to do with the boy's father, who was my friend and associate, and I think I can explain to you why he was not heard from for so long, and what became of him."

"First tell us this," begged Father, "is he alive?"

"No," said Mr. Russell, "he is not, or you may be sure that he would have found his son long ago. And let me say in the first place, to relieve your suspense, that Bollivar, as you call him, has every reason to be proud of his father's memory. I knew your father intimately, my boy, and I can tell you many interesting little things about him some day that you will like to hear. We were pals, as they say, and a finer man I never knew."

"Oh, I am so glad," said Bollivar.

"His name was Oliver Goldsmith Brown," continued Mr. Russell, "so that Bollivar's full name is Oliver Goldsmith Brown, Jr. He was a graduate of the agricultural college of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, but when I first knew him he was living in Brookline, Mass., and had,

married a New England woman. I regret to say that I haven't been able to find out much about her family, but I am inclined to think that she had no near relatives living. I met her once or twice, and found her to be a charming and cultured lady, rather quiet and retiring, but very hospitable toward her husband's friends and much interested in his career.

"I went to Yale myself, but took an agricultural course later at Cornell. I drifted about a good deal, and it was several years after I finished my studies that I really landed. Then I became one of the so-called explorers employed by the Bureau of Plant Industry of the United States Department of Agriculture."

"Explorers?" echoed Harold.

"Yes," explained Mr. Russell, "they are men employed to go about the world studying agricultural methods and gathering seeds and plants that may be valuable to American agriculture and horticulture. A number of our useful vegetables and fruits and cereals have been introduced in that way. From Asia alone we have imported cold-resistant and dry-land grains, sorghums, soy beans, alfalfas,

and forage plants, and also certain semi-tropical plants, such as the bamboo, as well as flowers, ornamental shrubs and vines, and shade and timber trees. The last report I read told of the results of a three-year expedition in Asia which took the explorer 1,500 miles, mostly on foot, through the center of China to the borders of Thibet and back to the coast by another route. He brought back with him the jujube, an alkali-resistant wild peach, some marsh vegetables, a hardy yellow rose, and a number of other plants and seeds, as well as valuable information as to Chinese agricultural and storage methods that have been successful for some 4,000 years. Some day I shall be glad to tell you more about these things."

"You must have had some interesting experiences," said Father.

"I have," said Mr. Russell, "and one of them concerns Bollivar's father."

"We seem to have finished supper," said Mother, "so suppose we all go into the other room. The dishes can wait, and we'll be more comfortable before the open fire."

When they were seated in the sitting-room, Mr. Russell said, "Come here, Bollivar; I want to look at you."

Bollivar came forward somewhat bashfully and stood between the visitor's knees.

"Yes," said Mr. Russell, regarding him kindly, "there is no doubt as to his identity. He has the same thoughtful type of face, the same eyes. How old are you, my boy?"

"Thirteen," said Bollivar.

"Thirteen. Yes, that would be right, though I can hardly believe that the time has passed so rapidly. But you will think I am a poor story teller. I must be getting on with my tale.

"It was in Washington that I met Oliver Brown. He had been in the service for two or three years when I joined it, and we became colleagues. Together we made an expedition to France and Spain and one to Brazil. Our third trip was to Asia, and it was there that the adventure befell us that you will most want to hear about."

"I suppose," said Father, "that if we had only known something of this we might have

traced Mr. Brown through the records at Washington."

"Yes," replied Mr. Russell, "you would have found his name on file and would have been able to look up his record, but I doubt whether you would have learned the really interesting things about his fate. Government reports are notoriously laconic when it comes to matters of human interest. Besides, I don't quite see how you could have tumbled on that clue."

"I mustn't bore you with a long lesson in geography, but if you should care to look at a map, you will see how many hundreds of miles we covered in Asia, traveling by all sorts of conveyances and sometimes afoot. Being unable to speak the languages of the sections through which we passed, and having difficulty in finding interpreters, we had our troubles, but we found the people generally friendly, and though we often longed for America and the home ways of living, we enjoyed the experience. Of course, my friend, with a wife and baby at home, found the separation more irksome than I did, for it was often weeks between letters, but he was al-

ways cheerful and he was one of the hardest workers I ever knew.

"As I figure it, Bollivar must have been about two years old when we started on the trip. First we went to Canton and from there through southern and central China, swinging around a big circle and returning to Pekin, where we remained for a month, preparing our reports and shipping home our specimens. We had been away nearly nine months then, and the longest part of our journey was yet ahead of us. Possibly Mrs. Brown was taken sick about this time or soon after, but we left before news of it reached us, and that was the last we heard from America for many weary months, so we never knew what trouble she was in. My friend was spared that anxiety at least."

"Did no mail reach you?" inquired Father.

"No," said Mr. Russell, "and we could send none. You see the Russo-Japanese war had only recently ended, and we found conditions where we now went very much upset. The mail service was entirely disorganized.

"It was our plan to swing around through north-

ern China, Mongolia, and Manchuria, touching at certain Siberian points, and returning by way of Korea and Japan, but I doubt whether we could have carried out our plan in any case with the country in such an unsettled condition. However, we did get pretty well north, and quite out of touch with Western civilization when we began to run into trouble. While Bollivar is getting me a glass of water, I will see if I can arrange the subsequent events in proper order in my mind."

CHAPTER XVII

HAROLD bade Bollivar keep his seat by Mr. Russell's side and hastened to bring in a pitcher of water and glasses. Ethel threw a fresh log on the fire and Mr. Russell resumed his narrative.

"Some day," said he, "I may have an opportunity to tell you, if you would like to have me, something about the wonderful country we visited, the people with their strange customs and ancient religions and civilization, and also their agricultural methods; but my business now is to tell you of the sorry end of our expedition."

The Babbitts listened with almost breathless attention as their visitor continued his recital.

"We had been gone two or three months from Pekin when we began to find our progress made more difficult for us. The people were less friendly and it was almost impossible to get interpreters. We proceeded very slowly indeed and we both be-

came rather anxious and impatient. I think it was six months before we reached Manchuria, and we had accomplished almost nothing.

"It was then that Mr. Brown was taken sick. There was no doctor to be had, and I would not have trusted a native, anyway. I tried to send word to points where I thought there were American or European missions, but without result. I was forced to nurse my friend myself, and I cannot tell you the terrible feeling my own incompetency gave me. We had a medicine kit, and we both knew something of first aid methods, but this case was beyond my knowledge. For weeks I watched my friend waste away with a slow fever.

"I will not dwell on all that. It was too dreadful. Bollivar's father died out in that heathen country, thousands of miles from home, and I could do nothing to prevent it. I buried him with my own hands and all alone I conducted the best sort of funeral service I could manage."

Mr. Russell was silent for some little time, and he gazed into the fire with a far-away look in his eyes as though recalling the sorrowful scene of his

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friend's death. Mother Babbitt wiped away a tear and they were all moved, but Bollivar did not weep. He continued to gaze at the story teller with big, wistful eyes. At length Mr. Russell continued.

"I will not trouble you with a long account of my difficulties in getting back to civilization alone. It took a long time and it was no easy task. I was pretty well broken up by what I had been through and I was greatly depressed. At last, however, I came to an American mission and the missionaries were very kind to me. They did what they could to get me into shape again and helped me back to Pekin where the consul, who had been informed of our disappearance, helped me to get back to America.

"As soon as possible I went to Washington and reported, and I must say I was well treated there, in spite of my failure to bring back what I had set out for. I was given my back pay and sick leave, and also an order for Mrs. Brown for her husband's pay. It was then that I discovered that the authorities had gotten out of touch with her also.

"Two years or more had elapsed since my friend

said good-by to his wife and baby, and over a year since any letters had been exchanged, so I felt rather anxious about them. But I was obliged to rest for a few weeks before I was able to do anything about it.

“ This must have been about the time that the Hoveys took charge of Bolivar, but of course I didn’t know anything about that. I went to Brookline, but could get no trace of Mrs. Brown there. She had been obliged to give up her former home, and being proud and reticent by nature, she had not confided her plans to any of her neighbors. It was thought that she had moved into Boston, but no one was sure.

“ So I went back to Washington, and here I was taken ill. The experiences through which I had passed had been too much for me, and it was several months before I was able to take up my quest. Valuable time was lost in this way, but I was powerless to help it. When at last I was well enough to get to work I spent some time in Washington, straightening out my own affairs and trying to learn what I could of Mrs. Brown from the records there. I

gathered from the correspondence on file that she had sent in a number of letters of inquiry, but of course the Department had ceased to hear from Mr. Brown when she did, and could tell her nothing that she did not already know. The authorities, when it appeared that we were in some way missing, did what they could to locate us. They sent word to all the United States consuls in China, and an investigation was started, but conditions were such over there that they made little headway with it, and my reappearance in Pekin was the first real information as to our fate that they had been able to secure. The only information that Washington had been able to give Mrs. Brown was that no word had been received from us and that every effort was being made to locate us.

"Mrs. Brown continued to write, and at last she applied for money, hinting at her destitute condition. A small amount was apparently sent, but there were no regular payments, and finally they stopped altogether. It was a bit irregular, you know, and when the Administration changed, and with it part of the personnel of the Bureau of Plant

Industry, the payments apparently ceased. I suppose Mrs. Brown had no one to help or advise her, and the whole affair became so tangled up in red tape that she became discouraged and gave up any further attempts to get assistance in that quarter.

“ From the correspondence, also, I discovered that she had moved to Boston and had found some sort of employment there for a short time, but her last letter told of failing health, of the necessity of giving up her work, and of her plan to move away from Boston. I suppose that was the time that she moved to Lynn, but there was nothing further to suggest where she had gone, and there was no address to which the Department could write after that. Her last letter must have been written only a few weeks prior to her death, but though I had reason to suspect that some great misfortune had befallen her, I could find no clues. It had all happened before my return, and so much time had elapsed since then that I was quite at a loss what to do. At any rate, I was obliged to conclude that I could gain no further information about her from the official files.

"By this time I had fully recovered my health, and as I could not afford to be idle any longer, I returned to my work for the Government, resolving to continue my quest for Mrs. Brown whenever I had the opportunity. For several years, in fact ever since that time, I was obliged to be engaged in investigation and exploration work, for the most part out of the country. Whenever I was in this country I did what I could, but it was little enough. The officials in Washington also started an investigation at my request, but it was a rather formal sort of affair, I'm afraid, and it came to nothing. All this time, of course, Bollivar was growing up on this farm, but I knew nothing of that.

"Last summer business led me to Boston, and I resolved to work on the mystery until I had solved it, or was forced to conclude that it could not be solved. I must confess that I had no very definite program in mind. I knew it was possible, indeed quite likely, that Mrs. Brown might have died at some time after her husband's departure for China, and the fact that she had not been heard from for several years lent color to this theory. But

I remembered the boy, also, and it seemed to me that I should make every effort to locate him, even if his mother were no longer living.

"At last it occurred to me that if Mrs. Brown had died destitute, as I had some reason for believing, little Oliver might have become a state ward, and it was while I was following out this suggestion that I ran across Mr. Peters. It was a sheer piece of good fortune that our ways crossed. He introduced me to Mr. John Babbitt, and by putting our two stories together we were able to arrive at a fairly clear idea of what had happened.

"I do not need to review all that, for you have already filled in the missing links in your own minds. I was able to tell of Mr. Brown's death, while Mr. Babbitt had evidence of the mother's death and the whereabouts of the boy. I was also able to establish their identity. So you see Bollivar's parents are both dead, but he now knows to a certainty who they were, and he is no longer a child of mystery.

"I have only one thing to add. I have been looking up Mr. Brown's affairs of late, with Mr. John

Babbitt's assistance, and settling up his small estate. With the back pay which will come from the Government when that claim is settled, a sum of about \$8,000 will become Bollivar's property when he comes of age. As he is an orphan and a state ward, it will be held in chancery until he has legal guardians appointed, which Mr. John Babbitt thinks is desirable. He suggests that you, Mr. Babbitt, take this responsibility and look after Bollivar's interests."

"Eight thousand dollars!" exclaimed Harold.
"Whew!"

"I am very glad for Bollivar's sake," said Father Babbitt, "for it will give him a start in life, and he deserves it. I shall be glad to do what I can for him if I am appointed his legal guardian."

"But oh, what a pity Mrs. Brown couldn't have had some of this money. It might have saved her life," said Mother Babbitt.

"Yes," said Mr. Russell, "it is a great pity, but I do not see how it could have been helped. It was one of those strange turns of fate that sometimes come to us even in this prosaic age."

During the telling of the story, Bollivar had said never a word, though he had allowed Mother Babbitt to take his hand and hold it. At last he spoke.

"I don't care so much for the money," said he, with the tears at last coming into his eyes. "I should be glad to share that with the other Babbitts. But I am glad—so glad—that my father was—was respectable. Now you won't need to be ashamed of me, will you?" he added, looking up at Mother Babbitt.

"Bless your heart," she replied, "we never would have been ashamed of you in any case. But we are just as glad as you are, Bollivar, to learn for certain what fine people your parents were."

"There is no doubt of that," said Mr. Russell. "As I have said, I did not know your mother very well, but I know that she was a fine, brave woman, and it is a great pity that she had to suffer as she did. But your father I did know, and he was one of God's noblemen. I will tell you many little things about him some time, if you wish me to. For the present it is enough to say that you have every reason to be proud of him, and if you will try to

live so as to be worthy of his memory, no one could ask more. You have inherited, as you say, something worth far more than the little legacy."

That night it is safe to say that Bollivar was not the only one to dream strange dreams of adventures in a far country.

The next day Mr. Russell was obliged to leave, but first he asked permission to see the farm.

"I have seen all sorts, you know," said he, "great ranches and little European garden patches, but the old New England farm is the kind I like best after all."

Ethel, Harold, and Bollivar acted as his guides and they took pride in showing him as much of Bonnyacres as the season would permit. And during the walk Mr. Russell talked most entertainingly to them.

"I grew up on a farm in Connecticut," said he, "and I intend to get back on one if I can ever manage it. It is the ideal life for one who really enjoys it as I do. All we need in New England is a little courage and the application of scientific methods, and we can have as good farms as any-

body. Our acres are still stony, and our land generally is not as fertile as that of some other sections, but we are close to the best markets in the world, and if we could only practise intensive methods as they do in France, for example, we could accomplish much.

“Talk about worn-out land,” he continued; “why, you ought to see what the farmers in China and Japan have to contend against. In some places they have been growing the same crops on the same ground for centuries. They work hard, and they have learned that they must not let the vitality of the soil run out if they don’t want to starve. Every bit of fertilizer of every sort is carefully saved and used; they would think our methods wickedly wasteful, and I guess they are.

“Farming has been too easy in America; that’s the trouble. In Iowa, for example, the fertile soil runs down to a depth of eight or ten feet in some places. All the farmer has had to do in the past has been to scratch the soil a little, plant corn, and get a bumper crop. But already these slipshod methods have begun to tell. They aren’t getting as

much to the acre out there to-day as the Long Island market gardener is with his eight or nine inches of top-soil, and in the Dakotas and other wheat-growing sections the situation has already become serious. Here in New England we have had no such easy time of it, and if we can learn how to succeed here, we may yet teach the West some wholesome truths about farming. As I see it, the New England farm is not in the hopeless state that a good many people think it is, though I am free to admit that there are parts of our hilly country where it would be better to let the forests grow up. They are needed, too, and our hills are natural forest land."

"Don't you think we can grow better apples than they can in the West?" asked Harold.

"Yes and no," replied Mr. Russell. "Our climate is such as to encourage the development of insect and fungous pests, and we have more to contend against. We can't hope to get trees to come into bearing as early as they do on the Pacific slope, and we can't grow as large a proportion of perfect, highly colored fruit. But the flavor of the Western apples isn't to be compared with that of the apples

of New York and New England. If Eastern fruit growers would only practise Western methods of culture and marketing, and would advertise their product on its merits, they could find a market for all they could grow, and at a better average price than is now obtained. The superior flavor of the Eastern apples and the nearness of the city markets should offset all the local difficulties. Why, if you stop at a fruit-stand in New York to-day and buy an apple, the chances are ten to one that it was shipped clear across the country and kept in cold storage. That is absurd on the face of it.

“ You people are on the right track,” he observed as they reentered the house, “ and the more that intelligent and educated people go into farming seriously, and not as a mere hobby, the better it will be for the country. Agriculture is and should be the most honorable profession open to man.”

It was time for Harold to crank up Henrietta—not the easiest thing in the world in cold weather—and take Mr. Russell in to town. He repeated his promise to come and see them again sometime, and tell them more stories of his Asiatic and South

American experiences, and then he shook hands all around, gave Bollivar a Japanese coin, and said good-by. It was with real regret that they saw him go, for he had made a friend of every one of them.

"It is a real gift," said Father Babbitt, "to be able to make yourself so welcome to strangers. I feel as though we had gained something of great value in knowing Mr. Russell, and I hope we shall never lose sight of him."

As for Bollivar, he seemed to hold his head higher now and to step with a prouder confidence. No one will ever know how much Mr. Russell's revelation meant to him. Not only had the mystery of his life been cleared up, but he had been given a new vision of his place in the world and the realization of a worthy inheritance of blood. Never again was he to think of himself as a nonentity.

Soon afterward Father Babbitt broached again the subject of adopting Bollivar.

"I expect to be appointed the boy's legal guardian," said he, "as soon as John can make the proper arrangements, and I see no reason why we should not adopt him as a son, if you still wish it."

"Indeed I do," replied Mother Babbitt, "but I think we should consult Ethel and Harold, since he will be their brother."

"There is always some doubt as to the advisability of adopting an orphan of unknown parentage," said Father, "since one never knows what traits may crop out in the blood. I believe I should have been willing to take a chance on Bollivar in any case, for we know pretty well what his fundamental characteristics are. Now, however, there is all the more reason for doing so, for if there is anything in heredity, Bollivar should turn out to be a fine man."

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it," said Mother Babbitt.

Ethel and Harold, when they were consulted, heartily agreed to the plan of making Bollivar one of the Babbitt family.

"Let's make a Christmas present of it," suggested Ethel.

"Good idea," said Father. "I imagine it will take some time to complete the arrangements, but if there seems to be no hitch, I think we can safely

initiate Bollivar into membership on Christmas Day. From what he has said to us, I do not think it will be necessary to ask his approval in advance, and so I will write to Uncle John and ask him to take the matter up at once. We'll let it come as a surprise to Bollivar."

As another Christmas approached, the family began making various plans. In the first place it was voted to celebrate much as they had done the previous year.

"You couldn't beat that," said Horald, enthusiastically.

There was a little more money to spend this year, but not much, and the purchasing of presents was conducted with careful planning and secrecy.

In the second place, it was voted to close the house for a few weeks and accept an invitation to visit Uncle Robert and Aunt Jane. Fortunately, Aunt Jane had been thoughtful enough to include Bollivar in this invitation, and the boy was delighted with the prospect of his first real visit away from home. But to Aunt Jane's request that they include Christmas Day in their holiday, they turned a deaf ear.

"It is very kind of you," wrote Mother, "and we should greatly enjoy it, but the Babbitts have unanimously voted to spend Christmas at Bonnyacres. We have come to love the place, winter or summer, and we all have a sentimental desire to celebrate Christmas in our own home. If you knew how we feel about Bonnyacres, and how much it means to us all, I know you would forgive us."

"In a way, I hate the thought of going away at all," she said to the others, "but Father is sure that the place will get along all right without us, and I suppose the change will do us all good, and that we will love Bonnyacres all the better for our absence."

"Yes," said Father, "and the head of the house-keeping department will get a much needed and well deserved vacation from her duties. There are periods of rest in farm and garden work, but so long as there are three meals a day to get, a house-keeper never rests."

"But how about school?" queried Harold.

"I think we can arrange that," said Father. "Part of the time will include your winter vacation, and you and Bollivar are both getting along so well

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that I think a week or two out of school won't set you back seriously, particularly if you are willing to take your books along and do a little studying."

"We'll do that all right, won't we, Bollivar?" said Harold.

"Sure," said Bollivar.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NORTONS very kindly offered to look after Bonnyacres during the absence of the Babbits.

“We will drain all the water pipes and leave the house shipshape,” said Father to Mr. Norton. “If you will look after the stock and poultry we shall be very grateful. I will see that there is plenty of feed on hand.”

“No trouble at all,” said Mr. Norton. “Hugh and I don’t have enough to keep us busy this time o’ year, and a few more chores won’t hurt us. If we git the milk and eggs it will more than pay us.”

“I hope Scout won’t be heartbroken,” said Ethel. “He won’t understand that we’re going away for only a short time, and he may think we have deserted him.”

“Fortunately,” said Father, “Scout is very fond of Hugh, and Hugh is fond of him. I think we can trust him to take good care of the dog and keep

his spirits up. A dog understands a lot sometimes, and I haven't a doubt that Hugh can make him understand that everything is all right and that we're coming back again. As for old Horatius, he can take care of himself as he does half the time."

In a day or two Hugh came over to get instructions, and Ethel took the occasion to impress him with the fact that Scout mustn't be allowed to get lonesome.

"I'll see to that, Miss Ethel," said he. "I wouldn't let anything happen to the old boy; would I, Scout?"

For answer, Scout laid his head on Hugh's knee and looked up confidingly into his face.

"We'll trust you, Hugh," said Ethel. "We have good reason to believe in your kindness."

Hugh was both pleased and embarrassed by this unusual mark of favor, and he fidgeted a little with his cap.

"Thank you," he said simply, and then, after a pause, "I guess I'll tell you something. It's about that pheasant that was around here. Solomon you called him. I guess you thought I shot him."

It was Ethel's turn to feel embarrassed, and she looked down at her toes while he continued.

"I was talking to John Terwilliger about it the other day, and he said the pheasant was around his place for a long time after he disappeared from here. He doesn't know where he went after that, but no one in this neighborhood shot him. I was glad to know about that, Miss Ethel, because I wanted to prove in some way that I hadn't shot him. I knew you wouldn't like it, you see."

"I hoped you had forgotten all about Solomon," said Ethel.

"No, I didn't forget about him. It troubled me a lot, because—you see—I wanted you to think well of me."

"I do think well of you, Hugh," murmured Ethel. It all seemed very small to her now, the way she had treated Hugh, and she was sincerely repentant. She was glad, somehow, that he had spoken about it, that he seemed to value her good opinion, and she felt that somehow she had come to care about his opinion, too.

"I'm sorry I acted the way I did, Hugh," said

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she. "It was very unfair of me. I don't know how I came to be so unkind. Can you forgive me, Hugh? I will never distrust you again."

"There's nothing to forgive," said Hugh. "If it's all straightened out, I'm satisfied."

"Well," she replied, "you are very generous, and I appreciate it."

"And we can be friends?"

"Of course we can," she said, with a frank smile, giving him her hand, "and I for one will be very glad."

She watched him from the window as he went off through the snow, and it struck her that he was really a fine looking fellow. He was whistling a merry tune as he walked down the road.

Christmas Day was white and bright, and a jolly time for the Babbitts. There was a tree and the stockings and the Treasure Chest and the decorations, and a big dinner. And Bollivar was initiated into the Babbitt circle. Father explained to him about the adoption and Ethel read an original poem on the subject. Bollivar Brown was formally made over into Bollivar Babbitt and he was a very happy

boy indeed. Papers indicating his ownership of the legacy were also presented to him, but they seemed to be of secondary importance.

"I was glad to learn," said Bollivar, "that being a Brown was something to be proud of, but being a Babbitt is the finest thing in the world."

As to that, the other four Babbitts thought so too. In the evening they sat about the open fire, making a light supper of popcorn and milk, and indulging in reminiscence. They reviewed the old life in Elton, their many old friends there, the house and yard on High Street, Maggie, Father's illness and partial recovery, the confusion and sadness of moving, the trip to Devon, the Hoveys, the Bollivar mystery, and the first year at Bonnyacres. It all came back vividly to them, and each was able to add some interesting details to the picture.

"It is one of the pleasant things of life," said Father, "that events viewed in retrospect often look brighter to healthy minds than they did at that time. We have had our troubles, but as we look back on the past to-day it all seems suffused with a warm radiance. And surely, the Babbitts have grown

closer to each other during these blessed days at Bonnyacres.

“Yes,” said Mother, “and you have been getting stronger all the time. That is what rejoices us most of all.”

“And we have added another Babbitt to the family circle,” added Ethel, looking fondly at the happy Bollivar.

“There was a time,” said Father, “when I feared that Bonnyacres might prove too big a handful for us, but I believe we have conquered our difficulties by team-work, and have turned the corner.”

“Bonnyacres is good enough for me,” said Ethel.

“So say we all of us,” said Harold.

“It is a dearly beloved place,” said Mother. “I have come to love every tree and rock and fence-rail on it, and all the dear live things in the barn.”

“And Scout,” said Harold. “He’s an addition, like Bollivar.”

The dog, hearing his name mentioned, lifted his head where he lay on the hearth-rug, and thumped the floor with his tail.

"And we have made good friends among our neighbors," said Mother.

"We are really becoming a part of the community," added Father. "That is something that city people seldom realize to the same degree. Altogether, with all our difficulties, past, present, and future, I think we may feel that we chose wisely."

All the neighbors knew that the Babbitts were planning to leave for a time, and many of them called or telephoned.

"Really," said Mother Babbitt, "I didn't know we had so many friends who were interested in us. My heart warms toward them."

On the day of departure, soon after Christmas, Hugh Norton came over to drive them down to Devon, promising to take their trunks down to the express office later. It was a full load for the old surrey, and the snow made the going difficult, but they made a merry trip of it. As they passed along the main road they all looked back at the house, standing there so familiar and comfortable looking.

"My!" said Ethel, "I'm glad it's only for a

little while. How we would feel if this were the last time we were ever to lay eyes on Bonnyacres."

"Oh, Ethel!" expostulated her mother, "don't think of such an awful thing."

"Don't you let that house and barn burn down while we're gone, Hugh," put in Harold.

"Not much danger in winter," replied Hugh, "with the fires all out and no thunderstorms. You can trust us to take as good care of the place as if it were our own."

"We know you will, Hugh," said Ethel.

Mr. and Mrs. Norton came down to the road as they went by.

"Come back soon," said Mrs. Norton. "I haven't been very neighborly, I'm afraid, but I wa'n't never much of a hand to go gaddin' into other folks' kitchens. But I shall miss you just as much as if I'd been runnin' in every day."

"Yes," said Mr. Norton, "your house will look kind o' sad an' lonesome with no smoke comin' out o' the chimbleys an' no lights in the winders at night. We'll be glad to see ye back again. Have a good time. Good-by."

The last thing they saw as they turned the bend in the road was their good neighbor and his wife, waving their hands in farewell.

“How good they have been to us!” said Mother Babbitt.

“True neighborliness is the American farmer’s finest trait,” said Father.

They arrived at the station in good season, and Hugh helped them aboard the train. With some difficulty he managed to get a last word with Ethel.

“I guess perhaps you won’t be thinking much about us folks while you’re away,” said he, “but I shall be thinking a lot about you.”

“I’m not quite so thoughtless as that, Hugh,” said Ethel.

“If you’d send me a postcard, maybe, I’d appreciate it,” said he, and it evidently required some courage. Ethel smiled.

“I’ll do better than that,” said she. “I’ll write you a letter, if you’ll promise to answer it.”

He wanted to say more, but the train was starting, and he had to jump to the platform. He took her hand for an instant and squeezed it.

" You're awful good to me," he stammered, " and —and it makes a lot of difference."

"Hurry up, Hugh," she replied, "or you'll be carried off with us. Good-by."

He stood alone on the platform, watching the departing train, and a look of happiness came over his face as he saw a window raised and a handkerchief flutter out. He waved his cap until the train was lost to view. Then Ethel closed her window. She was blushing and did not look at the others. Harold winked wickedly at Bollivar, but Mother gave Father a significant little smile, and he took her work-worn hand where it lay in her lap and pressed it.

"There are some things in this world that are worth more than money and splendor, aren't there, Mother?" he said.

THE END



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